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THE

CELESTIAL SUMMONS

BY

REV. ANGELO CANOLL

EDITED BY

HOMER EATON, D.D.

> "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory."—Psalm 73. 24.

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Preface

"ANGELO CANOLL, like Robertson, the great English preacher, will, we predict, should his sermons ever be published, become even more famous than when, in the active duties of the ministry, he composed and delivered them." These are the words of Dr. A. T. Needham, of the California Conference. There is reason to believe that wherever he labored, whether in the East or on the Pacific Coast, there is a wide and earnest call for a volume of Mr. Canoll's sermons. It is true that, unless it be the production of some preacher of world-wide celebrity, a volume of sermons, whatever its literary or religious value, is not ordinarily understood to be a popular form of literature. Nevertheless, it is believed that Mr. Canoll's long established reputation as a preacher of exceptional mental power, as well as of religious fervor and eloquence, fully authorizes the issue of the present memorial volume of his discourses. The most cordial acknowledgments, on the part of all his friends and readers, are especially due to Dr. Homer Eaton for the great pains taken, amid manifold cares and labors, to select and edit the contents of this volume. R. H. H.

Introduction

THE first time the writer ever saw the subject of this sketch, Rev. Angelo Canoll, was incidentally on the streets of Burlington, Vt., early in 1855. The latter was temporarily in the city to avail himself of the benefits of a certain sanitarium, meanwhile attending the revival services in the Methodist Episcopal church conducted by Dr. John W. Redfield, whose fervid oratory he very greatly enjoyed. I remember distinctly how Mr. Canoll at that time appeared. He was somewhat undersized, but very erect, neatly attired, and walked with a quick, elastic step and an easy, graceful carriage. His face was somewhat thin and pale. His head and countenance were of a highly intellectual cast, the latter animated by an expression significant of "high thinking and plain living."

My strictly personal acquaintance with Mr. Canoll began in the summer of 1856.

At that time I called on him at his lodgings in West Troy, N. Y., he then serving as pastor of the Ohio Street Methodist Episcopal Church in that city. The interview was a memorable one, and marked the beginning of a friendship that was destined, with ever-increasing interest and tenderness, to continue for forty years, up to the hour of his death.

Previous to this, however, as already intimated, I had heard much of Mr. Canoll's reputation as a preacher. When but nineteen years of age he had been stationed at Georgia, a small country village in northern Vermont. Thus early his repute as an eloquent preacher had extended into all the surrounding towns and awakened a most lively popular interest.

In the spring of 1856 the Troy Conference, of which Mr. Canoll was a member, held its annual session in Burlington. Though but twenty-four years of age, Mr. Canoll had at that time achieved such a reputation as a preacher that he was already accustomed, on Conference Sundays, to be assigned to leading pulpits. On the occasion alluded to he was appointed to preach, on Sunday evening, at the Congregational church, one of the largest and most important in the city. It was the church where worshiped many of the *élite* of that university town, including most of the college professors and students, as also the young ladies of a popular female seminary in the place. On the evening referred to the church was completely filled. Mr. Canoll labored under the disadvantage of being hardly more than able, because of his stature, to look over the formidable battlements of that ancient pulpit. Nevertheless, no sooner had he announced his text and theme* than his sonorous and commanding voice riveted attention; and presently the young preacher had that vast and august auditory completely in his power, and thus held it to the triumphant close. The next day gray-haired deacons vied with enthusiastic college students and others in their glowing encomiums on that sermon.

Naturally, even the most casual or unimpressible hearer would not have hesitated under the circumstances, on behalf of a young preacher of such mold, of such marked eloquence and power, to predict a brilliant and useful future. The object of this sketch is briefly to outline the career and to analyze the powers of this so gifted and promising preacher, while in the sermons that follow are presented a few specimens of his characteristic pulpit work.

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* "There be many that say, Who will show us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us."—Psalms iv, 6.

The theme was "Misanthropy and its Cure."

Rev. Angelo Canoll was born in Albany, N. Y., July 8, 1832. His early educational opportunities were limited, but diligently improved. He seems at first to have been strongly attracted toward journalism. Later he determined to study law. Reared an Episcopalian, having, through Methodist influences, come early to an experimental knowledge of Christianity, he soon felt it his duty to preach the Gospel.

His convictions in this regard were very pronounced. When afterward urged to continue his law studies his invariable and emphatic reply was, "I must preach." At sixteen he joined the Methodist Church, and a year later was licensed to preach and took work, as a supply, under the presiding elder. He joined the Troy Conference in 1852. On November 28, 1860, he was united in marriage with Miss Sarah Elizabeth

Wood, of West Troy, N. Y. His active ministry continued about forty-four years, he having occupied some of the leading appointments in five Conferences: Rutland, West Troy, Keeseville, and Albany, in the Troy Conference; Worcester, Boston, and Lynn, in the New England Conference; Nashua, in the New Hampshire Conference; Taunton, Newport, Provincetown, Phoenix, New Bedford, and Nantucket, in the New England Southern Conference; and San Francisco, Stockton, Oroville, and Chico, in the California Conference. On many of these charges he had hopeful revivals, a form of labor in which he especially delighted and was eminently successful. While at the Conference which met at Pacific Grove, Cal., September, 6–11, 1893, he contracted *la grippe*, from the effects of which dread disease he never fully recovered. It culminated in quick consumption. The end came unexpectedly, but peacefully, at Chico, Cal., March 22, 1895. His last words were a hasty, tender "good-bye" to the lone, faithful, heartbroken watcher by his side.

Mr. Canoll was eminently a pulpit orator. Even long before he attained his majority, he was regarded throughout the whole extent of his Conference a prodigy of pulpit ability, and ever thereafter, in all his various fields of labor, was uniformly considered a preacher of unique, versatile, and matchless gifts. His vivid imagination and imperial voice, whose every intonation was music, his fervent impulses, charming imagery, choice diction, and always fresh and vigorous thought, the whole set off by a faultless pulpit manner, combined to make him easily chief among his ministerial brethren. Not even in his very earliest years did Mr. Canoll ever court popularity by a sensational style or manner. He was always thoughtful, scholarly, manly, not to say profound. His style, if ornate, was always chastened, severely simple, and cast in the best of English.

One of the bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church, having once listened to a Conference sermon by Mr. Canoll, said at its conclusion, "I have heard a few great sermons; this is one of them." Another bishop, having heard him preach only a year or two before his death, made this comment: "A perfect sermon from start to finish." To few preachers is it given to receive such demonstrations of approval during the delivery of a sermon, or such an enthusiastic ovation at its close as was accorded to Mr. Canoll on the occasion last referred to—the missionary anniversary of the California Conference.

Our friend had the instincts of the poet, as well as the genius and the temperament of the orator. A sweet singer himself, he was a composer of hymns and tunes of rare merit. A more charming pastime can hardly be imagined than that of hearing him and his wife sing some of his own compositions. Only his excessive modesty prevented his winning a national reputation as a sweet singer in our Israel.

Mr. Canoll was an ardent lover and diligent student of nature; a discriminating and sympathetic critic of art; fully abreast with the most recent discoveries of science, as well as in touch with whatever appertained to matters of popular progress and reform.

He was richly endowed with wit and humor, the one as sparkling as the other was exuberant. These qualities, however, only rarely shone in the pulpit. It was on the platform—and Mr. Canoll as a lecturer was always able, eloquent, and most entertaining—and in his social life that these gifts became resplendent.

For his social qualities Mr. Canoll was no less remarkable than for his mental. How hearty was his greeting! How spontaneous and joyous his utterances! How fervent and firm his attachments, rendering him no less delightful as a correspondent than as a visitor or public speaker. O, those letters! When shall we ever read their like again—so golden in phrase, mellow in tone, rich in expressions of tender interest in the welfare of his friends, with only words of distrust concerning himself, and never an unkindly epithet for those who might have done him wrong? In a word, those who knew Mr. Canoll most intimately found him ever eminently modest, manly, genial, generous, and great-souled; sensitive—painfully so, sometimes—but always kind-hearted and true. His life was gentle, and the elements so mixed in him that nature might stand up and say to all the world, "This was a man."

Inasmuch as readers of this little volume who may never have known Mr. Canoll personally may be pleased to know the opinions of some of his contemporaries concerning him, we are permitted to insert the following singularly tender, graceful, and discriminating tribute by Rev. A. T. Needham, D.D., of the California Conference, and our departed and beloved brother's last presiding elder. He says:

"Mr. Canoll was a man of unique mind and of most unobtrusive character, and hence never obtained the full recognition to which his remarkable talents entitled him. He was humble and artless as a child, and shrank from notoriety, courting retirement, while meriting the widest fame. He was not as the cheap merchant who sets his best goods in the show windows, but rather like the plain, massive museum, whose richest treasures are within and most closely guarded. A familiar acquaintance with the man always heightened respect. While his superior talents attracted the admiration of all who heard him, still the nobler traits of his character only found expression in intercourse with friends and the duties of friendship. His loyalty to God was like that of Job, which led him to say, 'Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.' His loyalty to the Church was like that of

Cowper to England, who said, 'With all thy faults I love thee still.' His generosity was the weakness of absolute self-forgetfulness. For him to preach was to afford his gifted mind opportunity to soar amid the grandest thoughts and to revel amid the noblest themes that ever engage the thoughts of men. Sermonizing was his paradise. The rhetorical beauty of his compositions reminds one of the chaste English of Ossian's poems. He had the effusive smoothness of Macaulay, the naturalness of Goldsmith, the finish of De Quincey, and the philosophical penetration of Bacon. When aroused, like another Carlyle, he could hurl titanic blocks of truth to crush opposition or to annihilate error. In wit and repartee he was matchless. It was not the heavy, brutal satire that, like Richard Cœur de Lion's broadsword, could cut a bar of iron in two, bruising and mangling all it smote in its downward stroke, but rather it was like the thin edge of the Saracen's scimiter, that could cut a pillow of down in two without scattering a feather."

It is interesting to note that Mr. Canoll's last text was one that might well have served as a beautiful motto for a life governed by the convictions of such a ministerial call as was his. These were the words: "Thy vows are upon me, O God." After this last and most impressive discourse was over and the congregation dismissed he lingered in the pulpit, resting his head upon his hands, his frame shaking with emotion, until his wife, knowing his physical weakness, went to assist him; whereupon he turned to her and said, "When I come down out of this pulpit I shall not return." Can anything surpass the pathos of this scene—this eminent and beloved minister thus loath to leave what, for so many years, had been the scene of his happiest moments and the throne of his power? For a moment he tarries and mourns a work to which, alas, he shall return no more!

In his study after his death his wife found the following two beautiful stanzas from his own pen scribbled on the back of a Sunday-school report:

" When bending o'er the field of life,
When sinks my soul amid the strife,
  Of all things neath the sun—
O God! how doth it stir my heart,
What power to work and wait impart,
  To hear that word 'Well done,'

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"O, may I triumph so at last,
O, may I hear, when life is past,
  That plaudit from the throne!
Then, Father, cheer me as I go,
Look kindly down and speak, below,
  My all of hope—'Well done.'"

R. H. Howard.

Oakdale, Mass.

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I

The Celestial Summons

"Arise ye, and depart; for this is not your rest."—
Micah ii, 10.

The Celestial Summons

I

The Celestial Summons

THE words just quoted, although addressed to a particular people concerning a particular event in their history, have a universal applicability to mankind too evident to escape attention. I think you will be unable, with myself, to dissociate them from the idea of a great voice speaking to the whole earth—the call of Providence in nature and in the heart and history of men. Both the brevity and the painful circumstances of our stay on earth declare with positiveness that this is not our rest; and the call to arise and depart is, therefore, an imperative command from which none can withhold his obedience.

Our theme, then, is "The Celestial Summons." Probably the most familiar theme of all time is the shortness of time. The resources of imaginative genius have been fairly exhausted in the endeavor to illustrate it; but who attempts to prove it? Here at last is one proposition that may be submitted without argument. The most daring skepticism cannot but be silent when a congregation arises and sings,

"And am I born to die?
 To lay this body down?
And must my trembling spirit fly
 Into a world unknown?"

Notwithstanding the variety of modes in which this solemn truth of the passing of time is presented to the mind, I cannot but think that the heart is a far more active agent in apprehending and realizing it. In other words, it is a truth which reaches us, not so much through the medium of the intellect, as of the sensibilities. It is in proportion as the world we inhabit is the soul-world and the life we live is the heart-life that its tender character has power to affect and subdue us. The intensest life of man is the interior life, that profound and silent flow of thought and feeling which reaches out and on forever, and seems shoreless as the ocean of eternity itself. It is chiefly on this sacred current that we can take a proper retrospect of the little course we have gone over in life and rightly determine the distance that remains to be traversed before we finish our voyage to eternity.

How nature talks to us of change and death! Day and night, spring and summer, autumn and winter, are unwearied in their admonitions, forever saying, as they pass, "Grieve not for our fleetness—the generations of men are passing like ourselves." We look upon our gardens; the flowers are fading, and the fresh leaves of yesterday are trodden in the path to-day, like human hopes beneath the march of time. The fields, with their withering grass, the forests, with their fading foliage, the waters, with their changing music, the sunshine and the shade are ever breathing upon the heart the accents of mortality. And when we contemplate those great works and agencies of nature in which change is less palpable—the majestic mountains and the ethereal elements—we remember that at the advent of Him who saith, "Surely I come quickly," the very elements shall melt and the heavens and the earth shall pass away. Thus all the realms of our sojourning are inscribed with the summons, "Arise ye, and depart; for this is not your rest."

Shall we now, awhile, look upon our fellow-creatures, and survey the general movement of life around us? We recognize in nearly all the forms of human action and experience the recurrence of the same lessons. Life, with most men, passes away in laborious efforts to make provision for that old age which appears so rapidly approaching, though so many fall before the toilsome provision is required; or in efforts to secure those honors and distinctions which, they seem to be sensible, must soon or never be acquired. Even the wildest ecstasies of pleasure suggest, to a thoughtful mind, the folly of wasting life in pleasures that soon can yield no joy and of carpeting with flowers the paths that must so soon lead to satiety, disappointment, and misanthropy.

What means the rush of life about us, the restless hurrying to and fro? What means this clangor of many voices, this feverish tumult of existence? What have we in all this but the eager voices of a dying race busily fulfilling their plans while the short day lasts, the hurried tread of pilgrim feet on the road that leads so quickly to eternity?

Everything about us points to the fact

that we are pilgrims and strangers, as all our fathers were. To some other order of beings, or to our own in some different era, the days of the oldest would really represent but a youthful existence; yet they appear many, and life so old, so familiar have we become with early decay and early death. Of generations but a little beyond us we rarely meet sufficient traces to bring them distinctly before us. The hopes they cherished, the sorrows they felt, the altars around which they worshiped, the homes where they watched the sunset, all the earnest, loving, rejoicing, anguishing part they bore in this tragic human mystery—this, with us, is a matter of equal ignorance and indifference. They are gone, they have rushed by, like mighty waves, to give place to the impatient generations that have followed, and from the shores they have reached we hear no voice or sound but the voice that speaketh in our hearts, "Arise ye, and depart; for this is not your rest."

How clear is this celestial summons in all the voices of our own history! It is the most clearly heard when we take a retrospect of childhood, that season when the garden and the grove were vocal with the songs of joy and hope. And then we sit alone in the twilight and remember, as in a dream, the eventful experiences of the intervening time, and a long procession passes in review before us, but passes swiftly. And the same thing is true of every succeeding period. Even old age wipes its tearful eye and says, "All this is familiar as a dream of yesterday." Visions that once threw the light of beauty over life have dimmed and darkened and dissolved. Hopes that were fragrant in our way bloom no more. The lute beneath the laurel is hanging on the cypress now, and the dreamer's land of light and music is become the field of life's hard struggle or the grave's deep rest. Not in the weakness but in the tenderness of nature we look back, and the clustering associations of other days and other scenes lie cold and silent on the sere slopes of the past. One after another, its bright fountains are hushed and its sacred altars crumble, and all the changing scenery behind us is crowded with reminders that this is not our rest.

Each different era of our lives is marked by a certain characteristic train of pleasures and griefs, hopes and anxieties, aims and efforts peculiar to itself. How swiftly one such train of life-experiences passes away and gives place to a new succession, which, in its turn, lingers with us but a little while before that, too, disappears forever! With each of these fleeting successions goes much of life. By degrees, the mementoes of mortality crowd all the chambers of thought and feeling, of memory and love, and we are continually reminded of our onward hastening. Heart-links that bind us to the past are powerless to resist the silent drawings of futurity. Day and night, on the wings of every hour, the summons comes to us, "Arise ye, and depart; for this is not your rest."

In all the range of experience we have been considering, you will perceive that the declaration that "this is not your rest," and the command, "Arise ye, and depart," are absolute and imperative. We may not wish to believe that declaration, yet a little experience soon proves it true; we may not wish to heed that command, yet we are the involuntary subjects of its urgency. Who can make this world his rest? We may treat this earthly scene as if it were indeed our rest; we may love it as such; we may refuse to consider it otherwise. But, even if sickness should not blast and death should not devour, yet hope will ofttimes be deferred, making the heart sick; any one of a thousand contingencies may seriously mar our plan or overthrow it altogether; our affairs, conducted with utmost skill and forethought, will never correspond to our wishes; the expected good will not come, or the good possessed will pass away, and the truth will stand unimpeached and more emphatic in the very fruitlessness of our efforts that "this is not our rest."

Were it otherwise, could we secure to hope her fruition, her happiness, her earthly paradise, then the "Arise, depart," would come in to renew the dilemma. What defense may we provide against this necessity? We parry the blow for a while, suppose. Very well; we may interpose the physician's skill in our behalf, we may extract the virtues of every healing plant that blossoms in the dew of heaven, we may fly, panting fugitives from death, through foreign climes, wandering over strange and unsympathizing shores, where our childhood's home lies far away and our mother's name was never heard. Alas, we shall but

> "Linger out a few more years in pain."

The summons will soon come with a resistless power, and we shall, we must, arise and depart; we must go forth with death.

I have presented you with some sufficiently melancholy reflections. Let us see if the subject has not a brighter side, a more genial cast.

Let me say that there is also a spiritual summons, a call to arise and away which is addressed to the free, self-determining spirit of man. It is the voice celestial speaking to his heart to leave a disappointed worldliness and bidding his hopes and affections draw near to the Father of spirits. "Arise ye, and depart," it says; "for this is not your rest." "Come unto me," it says, "all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Though "in the world ye shall have tribulation," it says, "I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace;" and yet again, "There remaineth a rest to the people of God." Approach this rest, go forth and seek it. In newness of life arise; as children of a King depart.

This summons is not, like the other, compelling and irresistible. It is addressed to the free spirit of man, to his voluntary powers and affections. It is a call to come home to God, to come home to the Father's love and the Father's house, a call which is committed to the free volitions of the soul; and it may accept, or it may decline. Thank God, there are those who do accept, and life becomes to them, thereafter, a spiritual pilgrimage from rest to rest. With them, it is no longer a matter of despairing grief that their hearts,

"Like muffled drums, are beating
Funeral marches to the grave;"

for their spirit has heard its nobler summons and is busily seeking a better country.

This celestial summons, thus accepted in its spiritual interpretation, effectually neutralizes to a sensitive nature the dismal death-tint that tinges all things. Instead, it touches all things with a light of beauty and hope. To die is not to fall a victim to a tyrant, but to arise to a coronation; not to depart scourged "like a quarry-slave at night," or even

> "Like one who wraps the drapery of his couch
> About him, and lies down to pleasant dreams,"

but to float up, love-wafted, angel-beckoned, God-welcomed home. All the associations and concomitants of death are correspondingly transfigured; present evil, as an element of gracious discipline, is security for future good; age is an advancement toward eternal youth; mortality and immortality become convertible terms.

It is only during a brief early portion of our lives that the advance of time can be contemplated with pleasure or satisfation on any earthly grounds; and then only by the comparatively thoughtless or inexperienced, who see only the brightness of the new, without its darker possibilities of change and death, or at least the dark certainty of both approaching nearer every hour. Hence, it is natural that the mass of the people should yield but a reluctant and extorted obedience to the summons of time and age and death, that the heart should chafe at its limitations, and life become a helpless struggle against its tyrannous destiny. It is natural that people should cling to the present good unless assured that the future can bring them a greater or an equal one; at least, that they should prefer to submit to present evils rather than fly to others that they "know not of."

Our "Merry Christmas" and "Happy New Year" wishes are kindly meant. But so many Christmases and so many new years and old years suggest things not always calculated to make one particularly happy or merry; for to realize that the grave is one year nearer is not abstractly a cheering reflection or a natural occasion for merry-making. Ordinary experience recoils from time-changes. The will acquiesces from necessity, but would fight if there were a gleam of hope for success; and the heart does resist, in its silent, hopeless way.

Were there only some way to make us willing passengers out of this world, how much of the bitterness and the struggle would be taken out of life! And there is a way. Christianity accomplishes all this. It shows death as a way station where the Christian train does not stop. It reveals a heavenly destination which charms the soul pleasantly forward. It is only the inward resistance, the vain but defiant antagonism, that makes the summons to depart appear so despotic and terrible. When this is removed by the faith that sings, "I would not live alway" here, because I would live alway there, then the compulsory power, the arbitrary character, that previously made up the idea of death "are felt and feared no more."

The Christian is not driven out of the world. He marches with a free heart and a light step. How can we fail to recognize in Christianity a sound, practical, and beautiful philosophy of life? When we have heard the despairing admissions of skeptical philosophy, as it crouches back to dust under the shadow of that universal death-mystery, when we have seen the sublimest inspiration of poetry fail, and marked how the gladdest voices that ever sang in sympathy with living nature have faltered and become hushed at the contact with dying nature, or only striven to articulate the dirge of all good, how can we be thankful enough for the mission of the Christian religion by which the law of all change, the decree of all death, is glorified as a celestial summons, a call to come up out of the region of death to the fullness of life, the consummation and triumph of all our hopes and longings—death swallowed up in victory, and the creature that was made subject to vanity delivered into the glorious liberty of the sons of God.

Of course, it would not be admissible now to enter upon the proofs of that heavenly immortality attainable through Christ, nor could I, without detaining you with all the various proofs of Christianity itself in which that truth is involved. To me it seems proof sufficient that, without such immortality, God, or something else, if you please, has taken infinite pains to organize this world in the interest of death, which swoops down upon the scene conqueror at last; whereas, we cannot but believe, from the millionfold adaptations, from the general spirit and method, of nature, that it was organized in the interest of life, and that life, not death, is the plan that inheres in it and the power that administers it and the ultimate object it stands for and subserves. Between these two hypotheses, it seems to me, we must choose. Either death or life is the final all, the complete sum and outcome; nature is the agent of the one or the other. A serious, intelligent glance at the spirit and movement of nature should be enough to settle the question whether death or life is the objective point of all its magnificently vital forces and living system.

Nor may I linger to describe the method by which a sense of union with Christ becomes not only a conviction, but the consciousness, of immortality and an intuition —will you start if I shall call it so?—an intuition of the new life, of the new man in Christ Jesus. "For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life. Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit. Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, while we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord." This confidence of immortality in the mind of the Christian believer grows clearer and clearer as the soul advances in Christ from sin to holiness; and its possession by the children of God throughout the world, of every extreme of youth and age and culture, from the ripe Christian scholar or philosopher down to the last pagan convert, in spite of all the difficulties that may formerly have complicated the idea of immortality in their minds, and still do in others—this fact is not otherwise to be explained than by the workings of the Spirit, and ought not to be underrated in the argument.

But it is not in my province to-day to argue the truth of the conviction, but simply to show what a power there is in it, what a reversal of our despair, what brighter views of existence, what an exaltation and coronation of humanity. Life, as an angel, comes flying, veiled in mortal mystery, and death is the summons, not into the cloud, but through the cloud, to the immortal life that rides upon it. And such hymns of peace, such hallelujahs of salvation, as the soul sings when that cloud is rifted to its vision and it catches a view of its redemption from death! If this were known as it might be known it would thrill the world with joy. Death, viewed in itself, is such an appalling and all-shadowing evil that for most people it takes the very heart out of life, even while they do live, and leaves them only the moral skeletons of themselves, instead of the strong, brave, buoyant, triumphant men and women they ought to be. It is an awful thing to go through the world carrying the burden of death everywhere and into all things—upon your mind death, upon your heart death, upon the works of your hands death; thought, feeling, action all overshadowed and overwhelmed with it.

He who hears the celestial summons and in spirit answers it lays that burden down, and the life angel walks with him thenceforth. In the sick room and the desolate home, and beside the graves of yesterday and to-day, and through the suspense that shadows the seas, the thought of death now throws him back upon the heart of life, gives him an intenser sympathy with life, a grander enthusiasm for it, now that he knows that the meaning of things is life and not death.

And while immortality is there, the call to action for it is here; and in pursuance of that action and preparation for it, in himself and in all around him, the true life grows and spreads, plants its kingdom deeper in the heart, wider through the world, until all earth and time are suffused with the beauty, and rapt in the music, of one celestial summons pealing its triumphal anthem over all that we called death. All humanity hears the omnipotent voice that utters, "Arise ye, and depart; for this is not your rest;" while only faith hears it add, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest;" and hears again, "There remaineth a rest for the people of God."

There are those who do hear the higher spiritual summons; but others "forbear." For them no life lessons avail, no life experiences have any spiritually elevating power. Do they not suggest an analogy to the children of Israel, to whom the text was originally addressed? The land where they dwelt was shortly to be visited with the horrors of invasive war, and there they could not rest; they must needs arise and depart. But did they depart for a happy land, for a congenial dwelling? Nay, they went forth to a long and grievous captivity, where they could not but remember, with tears of vain remorse, the land they had so impiously inhabited, a land from which they had been cast forth, yet not to find a rest.

How then should this Scripture be applied to us all? Shall it be said, in the stern, arbitrary sense first considered, "Arise ye, and depart; for this is not your rest?" Need it be enjoined, "Gather yourselves unto your fathers, hasten on to the valley of death, arise, depart, and die?" O, there is a voice in nature crying thus, the utterance of a Power that will be heard and will be obeyed. Nay, then, let us arise spiritually and depart voluntarily. The affections transferred above, every duty performed, every sin and temptation vanquished, these shall be the successive steps of our pilgrimage in obedience to the celestial summons, as we ascend from death to the fullness of life in the world beyond.

II

Christ the World-Leader

"Behold, I have given him for . . . a leader and commander to the people."—Isa. lv, 4.

II

Christ the World-Leader

THE whole past compels the conclusion that there naturally inheres in humanity no effective tendency to seek out and make for itself a career such as it might justly aspire after, such as would achieve its grandest possibilities in this world. That tendency can only be derived from without, as a fire is kindled from beyond itself—from some higher, diviner, yet not inaccessible altar. The grand movement of which humanity is capable can proceed only under the accepted auspices of some superior and mighty leadership, marching at the head of the whole monarchy of men.

What, would we say, must be the qualifications for such a world-leadership ? On this point our opinions need not be fanciful. The history of the world defines and determines the necessary qualifications, as truly as the physical constitution of this planet defines what it requires for a sun. Whether supplied or not, the demands are explicit.

The Leader must be a Person, not an idea or a system. Mankind is not fitted to follow the guidance of any abstraction. He must be "Man with men;" not only human, but intensely human; with hands that our hands can clasp, with eyes into which our eyes can look, with a heart against which our hearts can throb; with us, for us, of us; gathering the sympathies and attachments of his followers around one real and intensely human personality.

Yet, while human, his nature must have a comprehensiveness which embraces humanity—all which that solemn name means and includes. Statesmanship deals mostly with local political interests and relations; political economy itself only treats of the same things on a larger plane; philosophy addresses itself to the intellect, and poetry to the heart; experience furnishes itself from the incomplete records of the past; and sagacity infers the probabilities concerning the immediate period which can scarcely be called future. But the Leader must give the law from which laws are made, must expound the conditions and furnish the elemental strength of true social prosperity and secular progress. He must meet the profoundest problems of thought, not with the laboring and uncertain methods of logic, but with the swift and sure light of absolute truth. He must interpret to the human heart the mystery of its ceaseless dream, by disclosing realities of being that match its boundless longings and suspense, and must make clear to men that their longings resound to truths deep-set in the Invisible. He must group the lessons of the past with an intelligence that is more than experience, and conduct to the future with an insight that is not calculation, but revelation. All this is implied in his office.

The Leader must be the reconciler of the contradictions of history, the conflicting facts of human nature, of human existence. Why is man a being at once so abject and so exalted, retaining amid so much folly such noble reason, amid so much wickedness such authority of conscience, doomed to such brevity of life, yet dying in a vision of immortality, so earthly, so animal, and yet so "little lower than the angels?" What philosophy or religion gives us the clew to these enigmas of existence, these paradoxes of our nature? Where is the system that unfolds the hidden correspondences and harmonies of these opposing facts, that logically combines them, and thus practically elucidates them?

But if the attitude which the Gospel holds toward either of these opposing lines of fact were to be changed the Gospel itself would be destroyed. It requires them both, it is built upon them both together. It reconciles this great contradiction in the human soul. If man is a being morally fallen, yet redeemed; a violator of divine law, yet an inheritor of divine mercy; to be disciplined on earth for heaven—these truths explain the conflict in the facts of human existence and unify its opposite tendencies into parts of one great moral order. Yes, so strongly intrenched in the very facts of human nature is His claim whom we believe God has given for a Leader to the people that you cannot resolve the system of human life without him, nor without him meet the conditions of a philosophical idea of humanity.

The Leader of humanity must be a moral Leader. Indeed, no man has ever been in any broad sense a leader of considerable masses of men who has not been identified with the moral element and acted upon men through their moral consciousness.

No philosopher, no hero, no civilian, as such, has created a new social order permanently operative. Great revolutions hinge on moral ideas. Humanity is constituted to be controlled through its moral faculties. The World-Leader must appreciate the sanctity of the human soul. He must be able to answer those great questions, to represent those supreme interests, that are heard and felt in the spiritual consciousness of being. And what an astonishing variety of offices this involves!

He must attack the prejudices of error, conciliating prejudice with the satisfactions of truth. He must quicken the sense of responsibility, yet meet the exigency of sin with the proffer of righteousness. He must provoke and pacify the conscience, striking the sword of terror into the heart of guilt, yet waving over the penitent heart the scepter of peace. And since, at the awful juncture where all is at stake and all is in suspense, humanity has but one supreme desire—the desire for God and immortality—he must be ready, not only to prove their existence, but to enable that desire to attain its fulfillment, supplying what will satisfy the soul and support it in its mortal crisis.

He must reach the whole distance from the genesis of a human life up to the human ultimate, from the divine thought incarnated in the cradled infant up to the full-grown, full-saved man triumphant and immortal.

But in whom could we trust for such offices as these? He whom we shall trust must first be able to still the raging sea and raise the dead. Alas for the leader who should need to depend alone on the superior wisdom of his teaching or the purity of his ethics! Wisdom and purity might be transcendent, and for that very reason transcend the capacity of many in the world-crowd to recognize their worth. In matters that depend upon purely intellectual and moral perceptions the result must always be uncertain in a world where the eye of the understanding and the eye of the conscience are both so liable to be diseased.

The Leader, therefore, needs to authenticate himself to men, partly, through the medium of the senses, by proofs of such a kind, of such an outward, sensible kind, as shall leave no reasonable doubt of his divine commission.

Now, in regard to that heaven-appointed Leader who is known by the name of Jesus the Christ, I know of little that impresses one more profoundly with the truthfulness of his claim, or that goes further to invest it with an air of candor and sincerity, than the continuous appeal he makes to those plain, open, matter-of-fact, yet extraordinary works of which the very senses of common men can judge for themselves. His whole personal history is so everywhere interpenetrated and suffused with the miraculous element that there is no possibility of its having been interpolated by a later age; it cannot be excluded without destroying the Christ of history and constructing a new Christ that history has never known—which would be no explanation at all of the Christ it does know.

It would not be allowable now to bring forward formal proofs of the genuineness of his miracles. It is only permitted me to point to the fact that just that kind of evidence which would properly be demanded and would be necessary to authenticate a heaven-appointed Leader of men—exactly such evidence he appealed to; and, though theoretical and metaphysical arguments without number have been urged against his miracles, they stand without an answer from the purely historical side to this day. Few realize, I think, how deep and broad and massive this evidence is. For twenty centuries before his birth the institutions, the whole civil and religious polity and history of the most conservative people of all time were being continuously elaborated into a manifold and striking prophecy and type, to which the facts of Christianity exactly correspond, as antitypes, as the objects that were represented—involving a long succession of widely scattered agencies beyond the possibility of collusion, and that could not have known to what end they were working.

Not less than four thousand years had rolled away since the first dim promise was given of the conquering One who should come. Not less than two thousand years before had Abraham heard it said, "In thy seed shall all nations of the earth be blessed." It was nearly as many since the patriarch Jacob, in dying, had declared, "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be." How wonderful to know that after that lapse of ages, when the ten tribes had been utterly dispersed and confounded and Benjamin absorbed, that that single tribe of Judah, though on the eve of the same fate from the Roman power, did retain her distinctive tribeship and ruler until Christ appeared—the last native lawgiver she has seen from that day to this! Still further, ancient prophecy had even foretold the family of his descent, the town of his birth, and nearly five hundred years before the event Daniel's famous prophecy had defined the immediate time.

Yet, after all, how could such a Being ever be? What incompatible conditions, what self-contradictory characteristics, must such an existence involve! For he should be David's Lord, and he should be David's son. He should be the delight of the intolerant Jews, and he should be the hope of the hated Gentiles. He was to be the terrible Lion of the tribe of Judah, and he was to be the meek Lamb of God. He was to be the King of glory, and he was to be a Man of sorrows. All kingdoms, all languages should serve him, and of the people there should be none with him. He should have an everlasting dominion, and he should fill a felon's grave. How could such conflicting opposites ever be combined in one and the same being?

Here was a plan running through the ages, underlying the revolutions of empires, contemplating a world-leadership; a plan that could no more be fulfilled by collusion than it could be fulfilled by chance, and that sets either explanation at utter defiance; a plan which neither human wisdom nor human folly would have predicted, and only almighty power could fulfill.

To him who can meet the conditions, God issues credentials for the leadership of the world. And Christ alone meets the conditions and holds the credentials. They stand out as plain and clear in his life as the mountains on the earth and the stars in the sky. They resolve the history of the world into moral unity. Against this massed and monumental evidence which I have barely alluded to, the flimsy, filmy theories of rationalism dash as vainly as the shock of wreathed cobwebs against the pyramids of Egypt. What can it avail infidelity to controvert each separate miracle of Christ, unless it can overthrow that measureless miracle which Christ himself presents?

And with a proper authentication to the reason and the most profound authentication to the conscience, the Leader should also be authenticated to the heart, the affections. But where is the leader who is able, out of his own love to humanity, to kindle an answering love that shall be the principle of a deathless loyalty and the very motive power of a new kingdom among men? We have heard of but one solitary name that fills this condition.

Every human creature on this planet has this latent claim upon his loyalty, even if he know it not, because Christ died for him —"He tasted death for every man." But herein what is his claim more than another's? Have not kindred died for their own, and have not heroes, martyrs, philanthropists without number died for the world? Nay, not one; never. Name me an instance. Each of the glorious number was destined some time to die. In a little while the one event that happeneth to all was inevitable. Christian writers, so far as I am aware, have missed the true ground of Christ's preeminence. The peerless and unapproachable claim of Jesus on the sympathy and affection of the race is that he is the only voluntary offering ever sacrificed to death. It was the deathless who died for us; he who had life in himself "became obedient unto death." Heroes, martyrs, and all the millions who have passed away went forth to death as to a tyrant, dethroned though he were. But the Prince of life leaped into his arms—from the throne of heaven he dropped into the grave. And when from that grave he comes forth, lighting the despair of the world by his sublimely significant resurrection, he acquires such a claim on our love and loyalty that it is a joy to fall at his feet and cry, "Take the leadership of my life, of my soul; the leadership of the world belongs to thee."

And how gloriously he accomplishes his commission! How all oppositions and antagonisms are made in some way to subserve it! Do not imagine that Christ exerts no leadership where he finds no loyalty; he is mighty even there. Christ is the only moral leader who has succeeded in impressing and controlling myriads of men in the face of their resistance. In his Gospel they reject him; but in the Christian standard of morality, in the Christian idea of society, in the code that pervades all Christendom, they must receive him. Scores of millions hostile to Christianity are marshaled into the grand movement of Christian civilization and wielded against their will. A mighty Leader, who can accomplish this!

When Abraham and Moses received the initial truths now expanded into this glowing Gospel there was not a nation on the earth that asserted the unity of God. The Egyptian priest, if he knew it, dared not whisper it. Now it is generally proclaimed and known under the broad heavens, and Christ has led up millions of devotees of false religions out of the grossness of the primitive polytheism. There was an ancient poet or two who sang, half consciously, of one universal Father; but it was Christ who gave meaning and authority and realization to the great truth of the fatherhood of God.

Thenceforth all things were possible which the progress of the race required. Nonsense of madness—this effort to antagonize the Christian religion with the very humanitarianism that was born of it and lives by it, as if the fatherhood of God did not involve the brotherhood of men, as if it was not Christ himself who led humanity up to this high level and brought humanitarianism in. The Christian Church was the first social experiment in history that had the aim of universality, and is the only one to this day that has the elements of it. The Roman knew only Rome, the Greek knew only Greece; it was man in Christ who first knew the world. Christ led humanity up to the ideal of itself, and now he must lead on more and more to its realization.

I read in a skeptical, scoffing American magazine this admission: "It was only with the advent of Christianity that the idea of one great family, each of whom must labor for all the rest, came in. That idea has been the nurse, not only of modern civil freedom, but of modern science." Hear this sentiment, also found where we should not expect it, of one of the most eminent of modern scientists: "Not till the right of all nations of the world to be classed as members of one genus or kind was recognized can we look even for the beginning of our science. That change [says the writer] was accomplished by Christianity." The birth of liberty, the beginning of science—think of that. Personally, I am not anxious about having the name of God inserted in the Constitution; but I want it understood that in all the world's magna chartas and declarations of independence, and in every line that guarantees the rights of constitutional liberty—his name is there, written by the hand of his own providence.

Show us a Copernican cosmogony, or a Baconian philosophy, or a Newtonian law, or a free school system, or a demand for liberal and popular education; show us discoveries throwing open the mysteries of heaven and earth to the craving for knowledge, or an impulse of invention girdling the world with new and marvelous forces—printing press and steam engine and railway and telegraph and all they pioneer in art and artisanship; show us a general diffusion of intelligence and personal independence and social comfort liberally shared by the mass of the people; find somewhere a general abolition of slavery, or a crusade against caste, or a real popular ballot, or a real representative system, or an emancipation of woman; find an unselfish missionary zeal crossing mountain and sea to toil in the face of death without hope of earthly reward; point us to the spectacle of peace societies and temperance societies and benevolent societies and sanitary associations and cooperative associations and prison reform associations; or get up an international fair, or an international code, or a congress of science, or a labor congress, or a ten hour law, or a homestead exemption law, or free medical attendance for the poor, or a free circulating library, or a sailors' bethel, or a life-saving service, or a poor children's excursion, or a flower mission, or an orphanage, or a hospital, or an old people's home —anywhere on all the earth, through all time, where the quickening impulse has not been given and the marches of life have not been led by One of whom the living God makes the announcement, "Behold, I have given him for . . . a leader and commander to the people."

If God has not given him for a Leader to the people, what is the secret of his unparalleled power over all the people, the immediate possession he takes of the individual soul? In contact with the Gospel every person instantly feels, "There is something here for me." Who to-day calls Plato his master or Alexander his captain or Cæsar his king? Christ, indeed, dealt with universal truths, universal wants and relations and experiences; but his measureless breadth and sympathy insure his leadership over men. Myriad myriads of hearts the wide world over find their all in Jesus. Ignorance and inexperience find wisdom in him. Poverty discovers in him a treasure. The child loves him. Age leans upon him. Guided by his truth and guarded by his love, millions walk life's troubled paths secure and peaceful, and then, fearing no evil, walk into the valley of the shadow of death singing his praises and shouting his glory to the last.

Christ's kingdom knows no localisms, no political barrier. Its banners wave from hemisphere to hemisphere, signaling all interests, all peoples, all men. It not only stands, but grows. Infidelity says, in a sense, that Christ never was, never came out of nonentity. Infidelity says he is dead; that after a few years of unsuccessful life he perished; and yet it cannot let him alone, but keeps the printing press of the world fairly groaning under the burden of its reexaminations and restatements and new hypotheses of a matter which, according to its own view, should naturally have dropped into oblivion two thousand years ago; Germany, alone, in a single year publishing five hundred scholarly volumes in discussion of the subject—a very respectable posthumous influence for a dead man who never was. Every year Christ gains a deeper control over the thought-currents of the world. In all the changes of history he is present.

Once in a while it may be allowable, I hope, to commute statistics for principles and moral facts that give statistics their highest value. It is well to brace ourselves for missionary work by feeling the eternal rock we stand upon. The question of all questions in reference to the missionary movement is this: Is it in accord with the divine movement, is it in pursuance of the divine idea, the divine plan in human history? The demonstrated fact of Christ's world-leadership answers this question. Events are answering it with the thunder of God.

It is found that a heathen or semiheathen civilization cannot permanently stand in the presence of the steamships and the railroads and telegraphs, the ideas and enterprise of Christian civilization. Deny who will that immemorial forms of heathenism are disintegrating and losing their prestige and are destined to leave the widest religious void the world has ever seen—a vacant moral throne over more than half the world; deny who can that Christ is marching toward that throne; deny who can that human control of affairs throughout the entire world is passing into the hands of the Christian powers—the whole trend of modern history is toward the unification of the race.

Nations used once to look furtively at each other across the world. Now they live and move in one another's presence; every day they meet on 'change, read their dispatches, and strike their balances; they work and worship side by side, and live on the same block; and twice within a few years Columbia has gathered them all to attend her birthday celebrations. It is hard to say just when nations "shall learn war no more;" but they are already learning not to practice it any more, or but very sparingly. And by the very destructiveness of war, which will finally be its own destruction, by interchange of ideas, by international exchange, by intercommunication, by growing community of language, by reciprocity of interests that must be effectual ultimately, God is driving the nations into unity and "conquering a peace."

Physically and socially, nay, intellectually and morally, the world is becoming one neighborhood, one dense, packed neighborhood. Who, do you suppose, is to assume the leadership of the whole vast aggregation? More and more it is developing common characteristics. There is a wonderful widening out, as well as intensifying, of human thought in every direction. It is not merely that particular spheres of knowledge and investigation are extending so rapidly and yielding such astonishing triumphs; this is not the only or the chief thing to be noted. The special phenomenon of our times, it has been observed, goes far beyond this. It is the widespread interest now felt in what might almost be called universal truth, in all forms and spheres and departments of truth. It is nothing less than "the whole realm of thought laid upon the whole mind of the whole world." All the great questions of humanity, all truth that man can take up into himself—his place in nature, what he is, what he can be, what he shall be—these are the fiery questions that kindle thought-activity around the world.

And not only this inner thought-world is seething and kindling like an electric flame, but the great world without—of events and things—moves along with this movement, this converging movement, that is drawing the lines of all life toward common centers, thrilling to common themes and throbbing with common impulses. God is welding the ends of the earth together; the embargoes of all time are giving way; geographical intervals are disappearing; there is no more sea; the great thought uttered at sunrise is the world's thought at sunset; live issues are taken up and put upon their passage; the world is being telegraphed and telephoned; ideas, interests, sympathies, humanities are commingling and intermingling, and all peoples are being marshaled within hailing distance of the cross—that is what it all means.

And when they shall come within clasping distance it will mean still more. When the nations and the continents throw the twining arms of a believing sisterhood around the cross, like a redeemed family—as sometimes we have seen a whole family converted, father and mother converted, all the sons and daughters converted, each dear one coming in to make the Christian family circle complete—when the very continents are become such a family; when not only cultured Europe and America look up adoringly into the Redeemer's face, with their thoughtful brows, but when brooding Asia falls at his feet singing, "Not Buddha, not Mohammed, but Christ for me, Christ for me; once he came to me, and now I come to him; I am clinging, clinging to the cross;" when Australia is pouring the music of her thousand streams and forests upon his march; when weary, long-stricken, but never-forsaken Africa, with that wonderful pathos in her eye—did you never notice it, the unspeakable pathos that is peculiar to the African's eye?—when *she* throws her unshackled, tawny arm around the dear Saviour's neck, with the tears of her long sorrow turned to tears of joy; and when, like a saved family, they are all praising and singing and rejoicing together—then the world will understand what all these things meant that have been astonishing us so.

They mean that the future of the race has something better than intemperance, war, oppression, the lust of gold, the mystery of evil, the carnival of sin and death. They mean that the Christ of prophecy and promise, foreshadowed to Adam, announced to Abraham, revealed to Isaac and Jacob; whose rulership was prefigured in the institutes of Moses and foresung by David; whose coming of one race, of one nation, of one tribe, of one family, in one place, at one time was predicted by the holy prophets; he, the Desire of all nations, whom still the wisdom of this world cannot understand, ever asking, "Who is this that cometh, . . . traveling in the greatness of his strength?"—that he is coming up out of the wilderness to the mountain-top, with such a following, such an ultimate glory, that he shall see of the anguish and travail of his soul and shall be satisfied. Think you we shall have one murmur left for our sacrifices when we enter into his joy?

But let us remember that he leads only, never compels or coerces. He leads, and the possibilities of a nobler and happier humanity that are waiting in him you and I will individually work out, and the Church and the race will work out, but only in free and voluntary following, heart and life singing,

> "Only thou our Leader be
> And we still will follow thee."

III

Nature's Interpretation of Immortality

"If a man die, shall he live again?"—Job xiv, 14.

"Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me."—John v, 39.

III

Nature's Interpretation of Immortality

WHAT is really the testimony of nature on the question of immortality? What is really the scientific interpretation of that testimony? These inquiries will bring into view some unnoticed peculiarities in the present scientific attitude on the whole subject of science and revelation. We have no quarrel with true science; but let every possible light be thrown upon the Scriptures, which we are to search for the magnificent treasure of eternal life.

It is now upward of a century since the literary and political circles of Great Britain were thrown into an excitement unparalleled of its kind by the publication of a series of letters bearing the fictitious signature of "Junius." Men and measures were overtaken with a power and ferocity of attack rarely shown in the annals of partisan warfare. A splendor of literary genius that seemed to exhaust the facility of the English tongue increased the excitement consequent on these letters, which appeared at frequent intervals through a space of three years, and remain one of the most extraordinary monuments of English literature.

The author was unknown; his tremendous assaults issued from out of total darkness, and were directed by a secret intelligence that included the plans of the court and the whispers of private individuals. More than forty eminent men have been severally charged or credited with the authorship. More than a hundred books and pamphlets have been devoted to its discussion. No sooner does one theory begin to prevail than it is supplanted by a fresh one. Macaulay at last is positive; but so had been a score of others. No detective device known to kings or critics has yet availed for the certain discovery of the authorship of the letters of Junius.

But what was the literary form of the efforts to discover him? The only form they could have—analogy, comparison. When any man was singled out as the probable or possible Junius everything he had ever been known to write was put to the search to ascertain if there were any correspondences of style, any incidental agreements, no matter how slight. Every turn of thought, every minute phrase or expression, was eagerly compared with what appeared in Junius, and the hundred years' controversy on this question has been mainly fought on the single field of analogy and comparison.

Whether the author of nature is the author of the Bible is a question to be investigated in the same way. Do nature and the Bible contradict, or do they correspond to, each other? Are there discoverable any peculiarities of style common to both, any fine coincidences and resemblances which might support the belief of a common authorship? Above all, does a careful comparison of the two disclose such an identity or similarity of characteristic design or method proceeding along the same lines of thought and execution, such incessant recurrence to the same distinctive ideas, such a unique originality of conception and elaboration, as not only to suggest the touch of the same hand here and there in many a natural law and phenomenon, in many a curious phrase and striking idiom, but actually to reveal the same pervading, divine individuality throughout the amazing volumes of both nature and revealed religion?

Nature's testimony in support of religion, though in itself insufficient for the wants of men, becomes conclusive when viewed in connection with the Scripture revelation. All that nature affirms of the mysterious attributes and ways of God, the Bible assumes at the outset. And, from this starting point, the Bible formulates not a single great moral principle which is not duplicated on the pages of nature. Even specifically Christian ideas and principles are thus verified. The Bible introduces man as on probation for even natural good; and that probation is limited. Law, with reward and punishment, extends over his whole earthly being. The principle of vicarious suffering, the effective, voluntary suffering of one in behalf of another, is illustrated in parents, patriots, philanthropists, and especially in all which the worthy endure for the unworthy; without the mediatorial principle society could not exist.

Minor and collateral doctrines of revelation are similarly illustrated, but I must not linger even to enumerate them. Physical nature is Christianity in matter. Include in the term "nature" the entire natural phenomena of human existence, and we may say that the elements of Christianity are variously distributed through nature in all directions, but only in God's second volume—of Scripture revelation—are reduced to order and unified.

Nature rises into more than suggestiveness on the subject of a future life; and it is along this line only—rather, along a single section of this line—that I propose to pursue the comparison of the two great volumes. A complete view would have to include the consideration of insect and animal transformations, and various other familiar facts which are often quoted in proof. To avoid doing injustice to the general argument for immortality, you will need to observe, right here, that these customary arguments are entirely omitted now, for the purpose of presenting a single and special view which has never been presented, so far as I am informed, and as I have been assured by competent authority.

On a general view, we must all admit that the system of existence, alike organic and inorganic, has a wonderful completeness. It is furnished with a fertility of resources, with means of renewal and progression, such as, in the absence of a proper doctrine of immortality, might easily have suggested the ancient philosophic doctrine of metempsychosis, or transmigration of souls. It has no chasms nor seams. On every side it is rounded out with exuberant fullness. An infinite forecast has penetrated all its emergencies, forestalling one, minifying another, planing off excesses, filling up deficiencies, allowing proper play to the several wheels, but holding each part to the plan of the entire mechanism. Never stinted, never parsimonious; neither cramped and narrow in its policy nor weak and faltering in its execution; insatiably planning and fulfilling, providing and perfecting—this, in general, is the method of nature, this is the spirit of nature.

How wonderful the interaction of want and supply, of function and organ, of adaptation and application, the ratios and proportions that utilize every possibility and make the most of everything! How admirably everything in nature is made to know its place, is subordinated to its peculiar environment, and subordinated again to other series, in ever-widening circles, till we pass from the minutest atomic unit to the whole illimitable universe! Muscle and motion, the eye and light, the ear and sound, body and soul, land, water, and atmosphere, space and stars, forces and mediums, elements and aggregations—how admirably fitted to each other!

As we ascend into moral and spiritual existence, which, for us, is the same existence, only in higher form, the same characteristics repeat themselves—the same copiousness of supply, the same all-comprehending foresight (or principle of continuous adaptation or concurrent energy, if any prefer to call it so), the same organizing, expanding, adapting, and provisioning of every faculty; with higher perceptives, higher objects, with nobler capacities, nobler work, with new emergencies, new resources.

This merging or evolution of the lower order into the higher; this overlapping of use upon use and grace upon grace; this continual advancement from the old use and the last point reached to new uses and ulterior ends and fresh surprises; this perennial blossoming of being, ever ripening, yet never ripe, salutes our joyous wonder alike in the material and the spiritual realm.

Nature never loses the direction of its movement, but, whether revolving as matter or spirit, remains parallel to its own axis. Throughout, the object is life. Throughout, a work is to be done, a plan to be fulfilled, crowding everything from immediate use into ulterior use, the ulterior into the ultimate, the particular into the general, the general into the universal, under a law of life that works on without stint of means or pause of action.

The soul is provided with the body, the body with the soul. Man is provided with the world, the world with man. Age is provided with childhood, childhood with age. Death is provided with life; and here comes the first seeming interruption of the order, or the first question of its continuity. Is life provided with death? In other words and to invert the order, does life belong to death, or does death belong to life?

Death follows life; but is this in the way of rounding it out, fulfilling its order, and in a sense, supplementing it, as other things supplement and give completeness to what they follow in the series we have been observing? If any are in haste to answer, "Yes, exactly in the same way and the same sense," then I must rejoin—the supposed parallelism does not exist; it is imaginary.

For, after all, thus far nature has made no full stops; it completes at one point only to commence at another; the action supplementary to something that is is still preparatory to something that is to be. What if this method persists in death? Wherefore the question remains, Is death the final end in which life culminates, or is it the latest visible branch of the great, developing order through which life is graduated to a higher existence?

If death is the ultimate end, if life belongs to it, instead of it to life, if death be not a transition to another life, then the infinitely vital system of nature comes at last to a sudden and violent end. Its ever-onward march ceases that very moment. Its generously-flowing current stands still, and its waters are heaped up as a wall, in a manner that renders the miracle of the Red Sea or the Jordan an insignificant performance. No such miracle, no such violent distortion and dislocation of nature, joint from joint, is to be found elsewhere. The whole series of Bible miracles that so disturbs the skeptic's mind sinks into commonplace in the presence of this self-contradicting and amazing anomaly, this infinite unnaturalness.

Then, when a man dies all nature dies—it reaches its end in him? The reply comes from certain quarters, "No, her vitality is continued in continuing the same series of changes without end, in repeating the same rounds forever. Nature deals with forevers, not with generations; with races and spheres, not individuals. This is the greatness of her majesty, that she despises and buries us *ephemerons*, and with serene immobility carries on her work without missing us. The succession you call death is life with her; the treatment you call temporizing is her mode of eternizing. Viewed from your standpoint, this is confusion; from hers, eternal order."

We are all familiar with this answer, which claims the right to satirize our views of life as sentimental, for the sake of teaching us to be scientifically logical. I cannot accept it as the logical answer it assumes to be. Its character as science seems as confused as our impressions are supposed to be sentimental.

There is a science made up of technicalities without insight, without that profound philosophy or penetrating analysis which belongs to a sympathetic identification with nature's own moods and meanings; a science that deals with the outwardness and form of things, and on some external particulars founds sweeping conclusions, as a novice in music, detecting the intentional discords of a great oratorio, might hastily set it down as a jangle without meaning or merit, and the great master as a mountebank. The science that does not apprehend the secret soul of nature is no science. It may laugh at sentiment; but, if you wanted to ascertain the real genius of a given man, would the scholar who has explored his mind and the poet who has communed with his heart, or would the anatomist who has only dissected his arm, be the best authority for your purpose?

Up to the phenomenon of death the general process of nature is continuously supplementing, enlarging, refining, repairing defects, indemnifying losses, apportioning more and better energy, scaling and mounting from round to round, working on through innumerable transitions to a larger life and nobler result. Her spirit is a spirit of endlessly diversified and ever-fulfilled promise; and it is no reply to say that this promise is not to be interpreted in favor of individual immortality, but only of the duration of the species, or, if you will, of the spheres, of nature itself. Nature completes itself and comes to consciousness in the individual man, as truly as in the whole race of men; and, of course, the race presupposes the individual. With its laws and forces, its orbs and systems, its constitution, its history—he requires it, and it all inheres in him. It takes its own method with him, and the outcome of that method is personal longing for, the universal nature-promise of, immortality.

This promise is not fulfilled by successions of large masses of men or other existences, through any number of ages; for the question involved is not the law of succession, but whether this law of succession is vital and vitalizing, winging from life to life, according to its uniform implications and tacit promise, or finally ingulfs all life in death. If nature fails of her promise herein, deludes and disappoints one, she does not escape the opprobrium by repeating the trick to all. She keeps her promise with the individual man, or she keeps it with nobody. Plainly put it is this: either man is immortal, or nature is a lie.

Death can be supposed to be only, at most, the reduction of existence to nonexistence. But the birth of all life is a demonstration that nonexistence is no proof of continued nonexistence; and it is abstractly more probable that that which once has been shall again be, than that that which never was would ever be. And so the man, dead, presents a greater probability that he shall live again, than there once was that he ever would live and be a man.

These are some of the reasons for thinking that the spirit and method of universal nature are in full accord with the Gospel announcement of individual immortality. At the same time, they are in full accord with the Gospel announcement that individuals will fail of immortality, so far as holiness and heavenly happiness are elements of that term; that not all individuals will reach a blessed and heavenly immortality.

Within the grand area of this vital movement of nature that we have been considering, we know that myriads of natural productions do perish—not to the vital plan, which still subordinates them to various uses, but to their own, to their normal uses and natural destiny; they perish to themselves and in themselves. Naturalists tell us that such objects are defective in their fitness for life; for science holds the operations of fitness to be as absolute in the sphere of physics as religion holds it to be in the moral sphere.

What is the law of evolution, as scientifically expounded, but the promise and process of life? And what is its elemental doctrine of "natural selection," which proceeds on the axiom that, "in the struggle for existence, the fittest survives"—what is this but a limitation of that law, qualifying its action, while still fundamental to its action? "Life," says the popular scientist, "is reached by a gradual evolution of things from a lower to a higher order; this is the process of nature, therefore of life." But ask him, "How do things rise from this lower to higher order?" "O, by a natural aptitude or capacity with which they are endued, or which inheres in them, for appropriating to themselves the food and the environment they need and for vanquishing what stands in the way of their obtaining them." But what of objects that are not equally fitted to achieve these natural selections, to obtain the right food and surroundings? "Why they perish; they do not survive; in the struggle for existence the fittest survive, and so nature rises."

Now, sum this up. Life is the outcome of an endless process of evolution; and one essential process of evolution itself is that of discarding what is not fitted to survive. In other words, according to the evolutionists and by their own showing, life succeeds only by limiting itself, by a self-qualifying power, encouraging the better qualities, rejecting the worse and going on without them, and thus enabling itself to rise higher and higher.

And without this limiting and eliminating action nature, in its highest forms, would be a failure. It survives in glorious beauty, strength, and excellence because, in the struggle for existence, the fittest survive. These views are accepted by many Christian scientists. They are universally accepted by the skeptical scientists of the day, who manipulate the theory in a way to make it serve their own purposes of opposition to the Bible religion.

But now, who can fail to see the striking correspondence between such a system in nature and the moral system of the Bible? How can any man consistently accept the one and cavil at the other? How can he fail to recognize in both the common authorship of the same right hand of God?

If Darwin calls natural existence a struggle, may not Christ call the way to eternal life narrow, and describe the entrance upon it as the being born again? If the gospel of evolution announces the axiom that "the fittest survive," is the Gospel of righteousness to be discredited for proclaiming that without following holiness no man shall see the Lord? When the renowned experts of physics keep reiterating that every year countless myriads of natural productions perish because of their unfitness to survive, is it ignorance and illiberality to believe that without repentance the wicked shall perish? Is the gospel of science, after all, so much more liberal and tender-hearted than the Gospel of salvation? We have heard a great deal about the partialism of religion; but what shall be said now for the partialism of nature, or of science, its expounder? Does the system of existence impose conditions on the development of a fly, of an animalcule, and recognize none in the development of a being who is to worship through everlasting years at the right hand of God?

And so, on the very doctrines of orthodox Christianity that are the most assailed and targeted of all, does nineteenth-century science wheel right into line with the Holy Bible and the Christian Church—certainly the very last result the skeptical schools ever designed or thought of. It never entered into their thought, when they put forward their evolution theory to supersede the need of a Creator, that it would end in establishing doctrinal Christianity. This is the real state of the argument to-day, and our worst misfortune is that it is unknown to this hour to thousands of intelligent Christians—even to most of those who have entered the discussion—simply because, not having put this and that together, they have not opened their eyes to see the positions we have carried and that we are already in possession of the field. Nothing can dislodge us from it but our own uncalled-for concessions to a foe who must otherwise surrender at discretion.

The intention of nature is to be inferred from the sum of its whole movement. That movement primarily produces and perpetuates life. But the effect on any given created thing involved in the movement must be determined by the relation of the individual to the entire movement; that relation may be antagonism, that effect death. Give an astronomer an arc of an ellipse, and he will tell you its whole form and period and in how long time that comet, revolving around the sun in a closed orbit, shall return. But if the curve be a slightly different one he will tell you that the body is flying in a mighty hyperbola on which it will never return, an unclosed curve that carries it forever away.

Does sin move in a closed orbit? May not its curve be the awfully outgoing sweep of the hyperbola? "Sin is the transgression of the law;" not, therefore, as we are sometimes taught now, "the full spheral harmony and completion of it." As violation of the law it is an element apart from God's order, and therefore is essential confusion and death. But for a moral and spiritual nature in its highest development there can be no death. To every invading disease, to every darkened room where mourners gather and kindred weep, it can look calmly down and say,

> "There is no death; what seems so, is transition."

But that state which the Scriptures describe as the being "dead in trespasses and sins"—that is death, the very death. By the joint testimony of nature and revelation, we shall survive that change which we call death, we shall each of us exist beyond the grave. But the Bible also declares that the wicked "shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power," that "these shall go away into everlasting punishment;" and the teaching of nature is no less significant. Immortality, not in the sense of endless existence, but as combined with holiness and happiness, with heavenly existence—in this sense immortality is conditional. And it is the special office of the Gospel to make known to us and fulfill in us the condition, which is the personally indwelling life of Christ. Is it fulfilled in you to-day? Without this, when your probation under the Gospel closes, is there not reason to fear that your sin will prove to be returnless flight in a moral hyperbola, forever away from God and the glory of his power? Opposite forces of grace and sin are acting upon you, and for the present, it maybe, you hesitate under their equilibrium; but that equilibrium will soon cease, and you will sweep out upon your long career of darkness or of light. You are defining your orbit, and you are defining it for eternity.

If you cannot believe God on the testimony of his word alone, believe him on the testimony of his universe. I am not preaching to you the doctrine of a tortured text, of some isolated and dislocated passage of Scripture. I am indeed preaching truths that pervade the whole system of the Scriptures; but you can burn the Bible, and the infinite volume of nature, whose pages represent eternities and where worlds are but letters—that book will never revise its theology to escape our fagots.

IV

The Land of Uprightness

"Lead me into the land of uprightness."—Psalm cxliii, 10.

IV

The Land of Uprightness

If anything could enlarge the significance of the words of the text to our minds, or deepen their impressiveness, it would be to read them with the passage in which they stand: "Deliver me, O Lord, from mine enemies: I flee unto thee to hide me. Teach me to do thy will; for thou art my God: thy Spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness."

"The land of uprightness" is one of the grand divisions of moral geography. "Where art thou?" said the Lord to Adam. And the question, equally applicable to everyone, is really as answerable by everyone. Morally, as well as physically, man is and must be somewhere. There must be a moral place to which he properly belongs; there must also be a moral place to which he actually belongs; they may be one and the same, or they may —not. But we can as easily think of body existing out of space as of a human soul, in the maturity of its voluminous powers, existing out of a moral sphere orbing the distinctions of right and wrong. "Where art thou?" the Lord interrogates man. "Where art thou?" his conscience demands of himself. So he has to take up this question, "Where am I?"

I know—first of all—I know that I am. Being is mine; with its capacities and laws and wants and capabilities and perils, being is mine. I may, with Job, open my mouth and curse my day, but that day shall not be blotted from the calendar of time, nor shall night and the shadow of death ever cover it. The destiny I could not elude still bears me on. The infinite mystery of being holds me. And, since existence is mine, how shall I employ it? How shall I escape its evils, enjoy its good? How, where, shall I spend it? I can only answer by finding, first, how and where I *am* spending it; where am I?

These questions open upon a man with all the lights and shadows of the universe. Existence has no possibilities too glorious or terrible to speak in them. And the very fact of existence addresses them to us. All its varied good and evil repeat them. Everywhere these prospects of good, these portents of evil, chase each other through this profound of consciousness—I am. And in the moral consciousness the question of destiny, the where and what I shall be, is reduced to the question of character, the where and what I am, one's individual position in the moral geography of existence. It is of importance to what division of it one belongs.

"The land of uprightness"—this discloses the fact, which so many overlook, of the inhabitation of character. There are some people who apparently reach a kind of aggregate idea of themselves as existing from the geographical position in which they find themselves; from the political government that extends over it; from a certain range of business they pursue in it; from the house where they eat and drink and sleep; and from the relations they have to various material objects in this material round. They weigh life, as cattle are weighed, in the gross bulk. They seem to realize their identity by the aid of surroundings and circumstances, and are thus fortunately assisted to a sensibility of their own existence. Happy for them that they have surroundings and circumstances, or they might never discover that they themselves exist, though it may not be so much of a discovery, perhaps, when they have made it.

The text reverses all this and says that character is my country, character is my home; I have no existence outside of it; in this I live and move and have my being. The upright man begins and ends the philosophy of life right here, with this supreme issue—not what he has, but what he is. Others seek life without; he seeks it within. They are pleased with shadows; he accepts nothing but substance. They play with phantoms; he deals with solid reality. He begins in resolute self-honesty, which is the rarest and sternest form of the virtue. After all, there is nobody that people so love to cheat as themselves. Men pride themselves on their honest dealings with the world and their not owing it a dollar, who never paid the initiation dues of a true life before God.

Now, when a man begins to discover that his character is his country, and his home, too; that it is the soil on which he stands, the atmosphere he breathes, the window he looks out of, the table at which he fares, the bed on which he sleeps; that it is everywhere and everything, and he has nothing, and is nothing, beyond it; that he is spiritually self-surrounded and self-occupied, and his soul can no more get beyond its integrity in the pursuit of happiness than his own feet can outrun themselves in a race—then the consciousness of being the wrong kind of man becomes a very troublesome one, unless he has reached that stage where the morbid and abnormal becomes naturalized, so that he can find more abstract happiness in living in a dirty house than in a clean one.

This strange inhabitant of a strange country, the upright man, the erect man, the man who walks straight, who lives by a rule and does his best to live up to it, the man who knows why God put man on two feet instead of four and balanced his head on his shoulders—worth our thinking upon is this man, governed as he is by a principle in all his transactions with time and eternity; sincere at the heart's core with God and all the world; not singing and praying, reciting creeds and receiving sacraments, with a devout face heavenward, to offset the daily jealousy and trickery, the covetousness and selfishness, with which his hands and heart reach down earthward; not burying the humanities of life under a stately altar of religion, or offering an earthly and materialistic morality as a substitute for it and a compromise; but recognizing God and man in one perfect rule of righteousness, to which he stands right up—upright.

Low standards of rectitude all around him, apologies, temptations, oppositions, flatteries, frowns—none of these things move him. He veers neither to the right hand nor to the left. Like Nehemiah on the wall of Jerusalem, he is "doing a great work" and "cannot come down" to parley with the enemy; would rather lose the whole world than the equilibrium of his soul by any means. There he stands—all the world knows where to find him—bolt upright. How all other distinctions among men sink down at last before the simple majesty of this—the only true dignity, the only true success, the sublime victory, the abiding, divine joy that no man taketh from him!

But we are to consider, not only the citizen, but his land, his nationality. "The land of uprightness" is the object of the soul's essential longings. There is no pilgrim like the human soul—on the earth beneath no footstep so restless; in the heaven above, no wing so tireless. Man's bodily marches hither and thither but feebly represent his incessant spiritual movement.

How early this begins! Your child teases the life out of you, you say, running into this mischief and that, now laughing, and now crying himself into spasms; you wonder almost reproachfully why he can't be still and let you have a little peace sometimes. But the world is full of novelty, and the child is full of life; the great, mysterious life-movement has started, and the wheels can't keep still; the longings of a human soul have begun, and the little wings must flutter before they fly. Think of it in this light, as illustrating the law of humanity's longings and unrest; that this is the way it acts in him; that he will let you have rest when he has it—and it will almost make you weep with very sympathy, little tyrant though he is.

The pilgrimage of youth draws on. "Fair lies the land ahead;" with eager eyes and hurrying feet we seek it; but, ere we reach it, its sunshine has turned into shadow and its palaces have vanished away.

But man's middle pilgrimage, in the maturity of his judgment, in the disciplined earnestness of his affections—surely this shall not disappoint him. He is not quite so oversanguine now; he can discriminate a little better between fancy and fact. The mirage of his journey has lost its power of illusion. He can detect the difference, now, between the floating vapor-lakes of sky, and the waters that flow earth-banked and green-swarded; between the gorgeous mid-air cities whose thousand domes flash in the light of a feverish fancy, and the substantial possessions granite-founded and granite-faced. There is enough of mockery in the past of his pilgrimage, but surely his coming way is not all desolate. No, no.

And yet, as he reaches wealth, with its heritage of care and envy and strife; power, struggling even harder to keep what it struggled so hard to win; fame, with its still unsatiated and chafed ambition; love, whose sweet altar is too often hung with a viper-coil, and at best is ever built on the border of a grave—as thus he reaches on without overtaking his hope, or overtakes it only to be dissatisfied with all he has attained, and no less dissatisfied to turn away from the yet unattained, we find that the furrows but deepen on his brow; and the longings for dove's wings, that he may fly away and be at rest, become stronger and sadder.

His pilgrimage seems all vain. His progress to each successive goal is made in dissatisfaction, to end in disappointment. Snares and pitfalls attend his steps, dangers darken around him as he advances in the worldliness and sinfulness of his way. He finds that over his whole earthly realm an inevitable doom is hovering and destruction is coming. He begins to feel as if he were in an enemy's land, and his soul to long for better things and to look up—when, behold, there dimly rises on its vision a solemn-gleaming border land, stretching along still and calm and glory-tipped, like a cloud-line in a golden air. "As a bird that wandereth from her nest, so is a man that wandereth from his place." But still the spirit knows its home, it tells its native shore, it feels the drawings of the Father, and cries, "Lead me into the land of uprightness."

I want you to observe this particularly—that it is a land, not a beautiful, but misty, region made up of all those spiritual sensibilities and moral aspirations which are represented, more or less, in every person's nature. There are people who call everything of this kind which they find in themselves religion. Partly by any good qualities they may have on hand, and partly by a floating ideal of all loveliness and beauty, they succeed in creating in their own imaginations a kind of Christian fairy land, and then, by means of this brilliant etherealization, they attempt to transport themselves into the Christian life. I fear they are only treading air. I fear their sunny cloud-realm will come down with the earthly drawings, and they with it from their imaginary heights.

The place the psalmist prays for is a land. It is a distinct, definite domain. It has its boundaries of separation from the common world in repentance of sin and in pardon and purification direct from God. It has its own peculiar conditions of entrance and citizenship. For it is not open to the occasional excursions of transient travel scurrying through, fantastic flights of impulse riding in on a high steed of poetic fancy for a vacation-ramble just to look around and see the country. No man enters it but to become a citizen, and he is naturalized the moment he steps upon its soil. "Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?" The world? —that means society, wherein, and just so far as, it is opposed to God. "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you."

It is a distinct, separate territory of the divine dominions, organized under specific rules of government revealed in the Bible, designed to endure all the wear and strain of actual life; it is the land of uprightness. Yet, once over the border, we find it as vast and boundless as eternity. From justification and regeneration, as they are technically termed, you can travel on in holiness, and when you have passed martyrs and overtaken angels your spiritual progression is rather commenced than ended. Yet, through all this boundless amplitude, it is simply one land of uprightness all the way along and stretching out forever.

Albeit, it is a wide interval from the border to that interior landscape where the sun never sets, and the dew ever falls, and the leaf never withers—a wide interval, not of time necessarily, but of experience; but it well repays the journey, and all life truly under the divine leadings that is not yet led into it is being led toward it and seeks and tends to it.

And well may "the land of uprightness" be guarded from spoliation and sacrilege, even in our secret thought, for it is all a pure, pure land: "And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God. I will also save you from all your uncleannesses."

It is a land whose people are all royal, the sons of the infinite and eternal King; a land of safety and of "the munitions of rocks," where the weak and danger-hunted soul, compassed about with songs of deliverance, abides under the shadow of the Almighty. No remorse, no infamy, no snare. "He that walketh uprightly walketh surely." "And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance forever." "Violence shall no more be heard in thy land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders; but thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise. . . . Thy people also shall be all righteous: they shall inherit the land forever."

Free from the thousand distractions that infest every road of sin, "the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace." "And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away." Yea, "a delightsome land, saith the Lord of hosts."

Where in life's earthly marches will you find anything to compare with this, of all lands God has set in the earth to be the types of better habitation? Go, search the glories of all lands. Linger in the bowers of vine-clad France or the wonder-varied landscape of wildly-blooming Switzerland. Bathe in the mellow light of Italian skies, when the evening chimes of Florence float out over the grove-lined banks of the Arno, the land of dream and song. Hide among the grand old fastnesses of Scottish glens, where Loch Lomond weds the spirit of the mountains to her crystal heart. Pass the flashing gates of the Orient, where golden rivers softly flow and the glowing air is burdened with the perfume of Persia's rose or India's thousand sweets. Stand when the light of morning kindles on the eternal ice-crown of Mont Blanc, when sunshine and shadow leap from crag to crag, chasing each other from Alpine range to range till summit and slope and height and depth—far down to Jardin's isle of flowers in the midst of a glacier sea—and the whole wondrous valley of Chamouni are suffused with brilliant hues that mock the rainbow and flooded and fired with grandeur that seems unearthly and unreal. Let the isles of the sea and the ends of the earth show you the charm of every land, with all that is strong in nature's mountain castles or beautiful in her garden homes.

Then come, walk in this land of uprightness, and say if every glorious and blessed thing they represent is not spiritually realized here; where alone the mountain of the Lord stands, and the everlasting hills are a shadow and a defense; where grace sweeter than the cooling dew of Hermon falls on the fevered spirit; where the green pastures spread and the still waters flow; where want never prevails, for "the Lord will provide;" where darkness never reigns, for "unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness," and "at evening time it shall be light;" where every common path of life smiles with hope and bursts into blossom, and rivers of love are flowing through sweet valleys of peace, that still gleam upward to a "far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

For whatever of evil or affliction remains here is "but for a moment;" and on this border, where the shining ones walk, only the illuminated mystery of death, as a hovering, golden mist, divides the land from very heaven. O blessed, delightsome land! Who would not pray, "Lead me into the land of uprightness?" Only lead me! I ask not to be carried by thy resistless power; I ask not to be borne aloft above the need of personal exertions and patient duties. I cannot but meet thy will. If by any means I can reach my true place in the sphere of moral existence and come into this blessed land of uprightness, I am willing to walk in the way step by step; yes, and if need be, to take the first step now.

Lead me, only lead me! Earth is no refuge, no resting place.

> "Danger and sorrow stand
> Round me on every hand;"

but I know that God will "never suffer the righteous to be moved."

"Deliver me, O Lord, from mine enemies: I flee unto thee to hide me. Teach me to do thy will; for thou art my God: thy spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness." O God, inspire and hear this prayer!

V

The Star of Bethlehem

"When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy."—Matt. ii, 10.

V

The Star of Bethlehem

BLESSED be God for the stars, shining as lamps, to light up a pathway for our thoughts to a world of purity and calm! I do believe that even the worst man on earth is at times a little the better for them. It is very likely that their celestial influence may never have stayed the incendiary's torch or the assassin's dagger, but I do know it has sometimes chastened the wordling's sorrow and curbed the wordling's thoughtless joy.

I know a man who was once giving a brilliant entertainment at his residence, an entertainment protracted past midnight with merry songs and dances; but, noticing from a window the holy serenity of the night without, he abruptly fled from the house, while the mazy dance went on, with its heartless din, and, gazing long and earnestly up at the stars that summoned into activity the better emotions of his nature, knelt there alone in his garden at midnight, and wept and prayed like a child.

I do not wonder that a religion like that of our Saviour, associating to itself whatsoever things are pure and lovely and of good report and lifting the vision of the soul to the quest of all things divinely good and fair —I do not wonder that such a religion has included the stars among its most sacred emblems, to be the symbols of spiritual truths even brighter and holier than themselves.

They symbolize the state of the blessed in a future life: "They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament: and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever." The illuminating influence of Christ and of all his true disciples is expressed by the same emblem: "I Jesus . . . am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star;" and the morning star is promised to him "that overcometh." A star was also the prophetic figure used in describing the coming of the Messiah when the prophet Balaam lifted up his voice and cried, "I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Scepter shall rise out of

Israel." That prophecy was wonderfully fulfilled when, nearly fifteen hundred years after its utterance, the wise men of the East were conducted to the presence of the infant Jesus by that splendid and beautiful emblem of our faith—the star of Bethlehem.

Those wise men, it is believed, were certain oriental astrologers, or magi, who came from the region of ancient Media, where the influence of their school was once unbounded. The expectation of a Messiah, or Renovator of the nations, had probably extended among them, as well as among other oriental nations who shared it with the Jews; an expectation derived, it may be, through the Median extraction from the ancient Abrahamic line and kept alive by the traditions so widely disseminated by the various Jewish dispersions. As the centuries wore on with these Jewish traditions were probably associated many of the ideas and practices of paganism or semipaganism; and the habitual Median worship of the Deity under the symbol of fire may have combined with these traditions of the coming of his Messenger, symbolized under the figure of a star, to suggest that rightful interpretation which, it seems, the wise men gave to the burning or luminous appearance that announced the birth of Jesus; or this interpretation may have resulted from some direct impulse of revealing power. I am merely sketching a general theory in regard to the identity of these wise men, without attempting to produce any historical evidence to support it.

The star itself was evidently some striking luminous phenomenon, supernaturally produced or controlled for the occasion, which announced the Advent to these meditative men and from time to time indicated the route they were to traverse, but certainly did not accompany them throughout their entire course.

To us as to them, the star of Bethlehem is the type of Christ. It is associated in our minds with his coming and offices, with all the endearing recollections and impressions we have of the Gospel of the Saviour. To us the star of Bethlehem represents the truth of Jesus. It is the emblem of Christianity.

Throughout the world we view the ceaseless marches of mankind. Every person has a certain life-path over which he travels. And over every path there is a star. Every one of these countless life-roads of humanity is lighted by some guiding idea, and the individual follows it, and is led by it, and presses on in the way it directs him; for it determines his way. It moves on, that ever-active, restless idea of his, and he hastens after it and moves toward it and takes his course in the world by the course of his own star.

And yet there are not many of these guiding impulses in life; though every road has one, yet they are not many. They would form altogether a smaller constellation than the Pleiades. Life-ideas are easily summed up. The broadest aggregation of human activities resolves itself into a few leading pursuits, and these comprehend the whole movement of society. There are not many life-stars from which to make our choice. Yet the choice is made early, whatever it may be. Not many steps are taken in the march of life before some idea is in the ascendant, and rises above every other idea, henceforth to lead the way.

That little child you may have observed near you, seemingly so thoughtless, so incapable of planning and directing for himself—that little boy very likely has already given his heart to one of those life-motives that impel the inhabitants of the world to their several roads. That boy, I say, has entered his path under the lead of some beckoning star, that already has power over him, and will have more by and by. No wonder the loving mother searches his sky to find it, with a tearful eye and an anxious heart. God bless the mother! God bless the boy!

And when the star is once hung in the spiritual firmament, and the soul has taken its course under it, it is wonderful how dear it grows, how its influence increases, how it holds its follower in its spell, through what hardships and dangers it will lead him, what desperate chances he will brave to follow it. How indifferently the young man sits down to play his first game of chance, how little he cares whether he shall win or lose. See him a few years later. It may be fortune is gone, friends are gone, health is failing, life is waning, but he is playing on. Nothing can divert him; he is in the power now of the star that he has chosen. O, not life itself can tell what it is to choose that life-star which hereafter, on the far plains of future years, is to sway the passions of the soul and reign supreme. It sheds its influence over one's habits, over his associations, over his character; it sheds its influence over his whole career, for happiness or woe. The light of sinful pleasure (I am speaking only of that which condemns itself to the understanding and the conscience as such), the star of sinful pleasure—how brilliantly it rises in the glittering youthful sky; how roseate the path over which it leads its votary! Yet who is happy there? Every flower of that path exhales the poison of death, every bounding step of that career leaps forward to a labyrinth of sorrows. And when the heart bleeds over the mockery of its own dreams—all remorse, all bitterness—yet the road reaches on, the star beckons forward, and the happiness to which this road never leads is sought, not by abandoning the road, but by continuing in it to the end. Reckless adventurer, your star is wrong. It cannot lead you to the goal you seek. What have you to gain by advancing? You are under a false star and on the wrong road. Turn—that is your remedy—turn from them, and God will show you a better way.

Like this, also, is the star of selfish and unhallowed ambition. Ambition is always sinful when it points to worldly success as the supreme object in life, no matter whether to wealth or fame. This star is ever pointing, ever promising. Be not deceived by its gorgeous ray. Ambition is a stern thing to follow. To follow that star effectually and only, a person must wrap himself in sullen insensibility to everything else. For everything else he must keep an averted eye, a closed ear, a heart congealed and insensible. He must learn to curb his noblest impulses, he must pass by a thousand sources of innocent happiness that are scattered along his way, he must harden his humanity on the anvil of his own selfishness, stroke upon stroke, and consent to be as mean and as miserable as the conditions of success may require—that is, if ambitious success be his only object. And then, for one that reaches the goal, ten thousand stop in mid pursuit, drop into their graves, and die cursing their star. ‘‘ But the one reaches it,” you say. Yes, but think at what a terrible cost — as one has sung who knew too well the truth of what she sang:

"Few think of life's beginnings. Men behold
The goal achieved--the warrior, when his sword
Flashes red triumph in the noonday sun;
The minstrel, when his lyre hangs on the palm;
The statesman, when the crowd proclaims his thought
And molds opinion to his gifted tongue.
They count not life's first steps, and never think
Upon the many miserable hours
When hope deferred was sickness to the heart."

Pleasure, ambition—heaven pity their madness who trust in such stars for protection! O, would we but consent to acknowledge what humanity really is and always has been under these illusive leadings, how bitter the disappointment and how intolerable the unrest their evil beams have shed upon the whole earth since it began, and then, as by a miracle from heaven, could we be made sensible that they shine with a ray as little kind and true for us as they have shone for countless others, and will reward our confidence in the same inevitable way, it does seem to me we should say, "These are all evil stars;" that we should say, "Your spell is broken." We should bid them begone into their own nothingness. And if you imagine that their disappearance would leave something of a gloom and darkness on your way, be certain it would not be long before you should see another star arising, and behold it—O, with what exceeding great joy—the star of Bethlehem.

For it is a divine star. Not " of the earth earthy " is the star of Bethlehem; not shooting up from the baleful, noxious elements of the world's depravity and unrest. No sooner does a man behold that star than he rejoices with exceeding great joy because of its benign and holy origin. It is the star of the Highest, and leads to him. It will guide a man to the place prepared for him in the plans and purposes of God. It kindles a new life, whose motive is sweeter than pleasure and nobler than ambition.

There is one divine Star for man. Two could never have been either given or required. There is one God, and the light of his whole divinity is in that Star. Take it as your guide, and the world has no more tyranny over you; the life of freedom is begun, for freedom comes with truth. That only is the true divine Star of humanity which shines over the waste and wreck of life, brightening the wilderness with beauty, glowing like a beacon to the perishing, and thus becoming the quenchless signal of God's interest and tender care for man and man's utter dependence upon God for light and happiness and safety.

The star of Bethlehem is a star of purity. Its peculiar excellence is that it leads straight away from sin, with all its entanglements and sorrows. It sheds through the soul, not only the light by which it perceives its dangers, but the strength by which it overcomes them. It shines down into purified affections, an upright heart, a guiltless conscience, and discovers a character sincere and true that invites the open light of heaven. It beholds a man a new creature in Christ Jesus, a being who rises and flings away his weakness and, in the light and strength of that good star, presses bravely forward—the song of his march being ever "Nearer, my God, to thee."

It is a star of love. Give an individual every other good the world affords; surround him with the magnificence of fortune and invest him with the brilliancy of fame; and yet deprive him of the sympathy and affection of his kind—and what is life to such a one ? Again, let his sunny future depart, his way become a rugged scene of every hardship and privation, but leave him the consoling sympathy and affection of his fellow-creatures, and with what strange strength he can bear up under adversity. From the child to the pilgrim of threescore years and ten—for the heart that is stricken with the sorrows of years and the approach of its mortal fate is not less sensitive than in the gala day of youth—from the cradle to the coffin how strangely intense are these longings, and how much of the history of life's joy or sorrow is bound up with them!

Well, thank God, the star of Bethlehem is a star of love, true, changeless, eternal love; every ray is a warm love-glow from heaven. I believe I may safely assert that the very first impression of a sinful man when converted is a strange, undefinable consciousness of infinite love; love intense and all-pervading, and himself, as well as the universe, the object of it; love he cannot describe, cannot comprehend, and of which he never before had conceived an idea; but love now suddenly felt flowing toward him and filling all around him. And so he goes on. This conviction, this consciousness, becomes the abiding consciousness of the soul.

You cannot make him believe now that he is all neglected and uncared for, a friendless exile in a world of untempered coldness and barrenness; that for him no fountain of living sympathy gushes unceasingly, no guardian tenderness watches over him amid the sorrows and mysteries of his way. He feels that, if he never had a friend before, he has one now in a sin-pardoning God. He has found in Jesus "a Friend who sticketh closer than a brother." He realizes the power and presence of infinite love; he feels it ever beating against his heart in great, earnest tides of communion; he comes into intercourse with a tender and unchangeable sympathy, and feels that on his heart and on his way are lavished the unsearchable riches of the affection of heaven, the loving guardianship of angels and of God. Perhaps some of you seek from human ties the brief consolation they can offer you for the loss of this; yet the time will come when it shall be worth more than all the world to feel that powerful presence of undying love which the star of Bethlehem alone can shed upon your spirit.

Is it not a star of peace? Holy affections reign in the heart; holy love reigns over it, reigns everywhere; there is such calm, sweet trusting and resting in God. And if that is not the "Star of peace to wanderers weary" which produces this, can you point me to such a star?

Yet Herod learned of the peaceful star and was afraid, and all Jerusalem with him —the one from political ambition, the others from political cowardice; a jealous monarch and a truckling people. It might have been expected that the Jewish people would rejoice to see that day; that, eagerly expecting the Messiah, they would be but poorly able to disguise their gladness or keep back the impetuous tumult of their joy. But the king grew alarmed, and the people frightened. That was the conclusion of the whole matter for them. What did they care that a Star had risen in its beauty that should shed a new light upon the night of the world, and that future ages and generations should bless? A low ambition, a sordid motive, eclipsed all its glory and left them in darkness and sin.

The influence that Christianity actually exerts upon us depends on the way we receive it. Why are you not rejoicing to-day? Why does not the advent of such a Saviour fill your soul with unspeakable joy? Is it not because, through the blinding mists of earthly interest and motive, you look at the peaceful star and are troubled; at the holy star and continue in sin; at the star of revelation and Christ is not revealed; at the star of redemption and feel you are not redeemed? It saves us and blesses us and brings us joy only as we dare believe in it, dare go forward and follow it—no matter for Herod or the Jews.

And thenceforth, whatever else may come, we have peace. Though "storm after storm rises dark o'er the way," this troubled world never yet saw that storm which the star of Bethlehem could not penetrate, chasing away the vapors and showing a clear way up into victory. And when the breath of life shall fail, the eye of faith undimmed shall see that star of immortality standing over and piercing the mists of the valley. Yes, the dear old star is there. One more feeble shout inspired by its glory in this land of tombs and tears, and the next shall be given in the land that is tearless and tombless forever.

The historical circumstances connected with the text have sometimes suggested an analogy to the proper way of seeking Christ at the present time. One presentation of this analogy I may be able to trace somewhat in general form, or at least to follow the thread of the general thought.

But first, perhaps, one sorrowfully says, "What if, like the wise men, I should set out to seek Christ, but should not, like them, find him? What if I should undertake to be a Christian and find afterward that I was not, or could not be, a Christian? This is the reason why I cannot see my way clear to follow the star. I would start for Christ to-day if I knew I should find him."

Another says, more sorrowfully still, "I must confess I have my doubts at times whether there be any Christ, or whether Christianity be true. It probably is, for I see many evidences in its favor; but how can I act on the evidence of probability? I must have positive certainty to start with. This is the reason why I cannot see my way clear to follow the star. Could I behold it with all the clear and certain conviction that others speak of, what could hinder me for one moment from following it!"

My friend, does it occur to you when you say this that you are requiring God to adopt a plan, in moral and spiritual things, which is entirely new to him and which he has not adopted in anything else? In all your earthly pursuits and interests must there not be beginnings, often very feeble and doubtful beginnings—acceptance of the fainter light till the higher and more perfect light arises by degrees; patient exercise of the lesser measure of strength, that gradually increases with the work done and proportions itself to the work that is to be done? Do you not know that this is the law of all human achievement? In your education, did not this law lead you from class to class, from school to school? In your business, has it not led you from one stage of fitness and qualification to another, from one degree of success to another?

You recognize this law in everything earthly; why do you object to it in religion, where it is equally natural, equally inevitable? "Seek, and ye shall find." But in religion you insist upon finding before seeking. If any man will do the will of the Father—that is, so far as he perceives it—"he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God." Now, a certain degree of the Christ-light has been shining on you from your childhood. Have you been attentive to it, have you followed its beckonings? Or have you stood still and waited for the star to advance, turning away your eyes and expecting the light to grow? Is not this simply expecting God to reverse his known methods in the whole system of human life?

Sit down, O magi, wise men of the East, dusty and worn with the long journey from the Orient, and tell us your experience in our humble Christmas meeting to-day. When you saw the star arise, why did you not employ your astronomic skill to resolve it into some different meaning? Were you sure of having hit the right interpretation, too sure to even say, "If we could only know?" Why did you connect it with the Star that was to arise out of Jacob—itself but a misty prophecy? How could you consent that proud philosophy should be yoked to the service of Jewish tradition, and stake your scholarly fame on the result? What said the dear ones of your homes, how laughed your brother scientists in the retreats of learning, how stared your fellow-countrymen when the camels were laden with precious gifts and you set forth on the wild chase of a star—simply because the evidence of probabilities was in favor of its supernal character and indications?

Tell us, O magi—for the way was long and weary—when the arid plains stretched before you, when ravine and river intercepted your steps, when nation after nation melted out of view in the growing distance, when your guiding light at times flickered, burned low, was lost in the glare of an Eastern sun, through roving bands that skirted the way, through hardships, perils, and deaths, did not your hearts falter and policy join its protest with philosophy against such an enormous undertaking? And when your confidence had been strengthened by new tokens as you drew near, by prophecies, traditions, gradually blending into confirmations along the way, when at length your journey ended at the manger palace and you knelt in the presence of the royal Babe—tell us, O wondrous travelers after truth, could you say from the depths of your hearts, "It is all we asked; we are satisfied?"

Methinks I hear the voice of sages breaking the hush of wisdom's worship, "What care we that the star rose dim, and brightened only as we gazed, and moved only as we moved with it? What tears have we to shed for the humility that believed, since faith is become knowledge and we know whom we have believed? What sorrowful retrospect have we to take of the road, though long and arduous, that led us to the truth? Lo, we have seen the Promised of God, we have hailed the Deliverer come. We have clasped the feet that shall stand on the summit of the world's empire, we have held the hand that shall sway the scepter of an everlasting kingdom. Satisfied? Witness the fervent kneeling, the soulful homage, the lavished offerings. We have frankincense for the God, and gold for the King, and embalming myrrh for the Man who is born to die for men."

They sought and found. And when you shall behold the Christian star only to follow it, from however feeble beginnings, through whatever difficulties and obstacles that may throng the way, then shall more than their great joy, "all joy excelling," the joy of the spiritual Christmas, come into your heart—that joy of the inner Advent which no man taketh from you.

VI

Watching with Christ one Hour

"What, could ye not watch with me one hour?"—
Matt. xxvi, 40.

VI

Watching with Christ one Hour

OUR Lord, when he uttered the words of the text on the night of his betrayal and arrest in Gethsemane, had already left the main body of the disciples at the entrance to the garden, saying, "Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder." Peter, James, and John are honored with a position still nearer his person, and with them he still continues to advance, until they also are left behind with the injunction, "Tarry ye here, and watch with me."

"And he went a little farther." Deeper than the nearest of his followers he must enter into that mysterious moral conflict in which the mediatorial battle was now to be fought out. I may not speak of that. A mystery of God drops down, like a summons to silence, over that scene.

"'Tis midnight; and on Olive's brow
  The star is dimmed that lately shone:
'Tis midnight; in the garden, now,
  The suffering Saviour prays alone."

Not content with passing this ordeal near his disciples, he presently repairs to their side to cheer and strengthen them by his presence, or to be cheered and strengthened by their sympathy. Needless office for them, vain hope for him—they are asleep! Worn with fatigue and heavy with sorrow as they were, none could be more ready than the Master himself to plead these extenuating circumstances in their excuse. Gently he said, ‘‘The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” Nevertheless, the sharp, unnatural contrast with his own amazing struggle must have cut his great soul to the quick. It seems to have done so, and the lips that a moment before had cried so meekly, ‘‘Not my will, but thine, be done,” were now forced to give utterance to that exclamation of sorrowful surprise, ‘‘What, could ye not watch with me one hour?”

But was not the whole scene prophetic and emblematic? How few watch with Christ! The strange spectacle that fills us with wonder and shuddering on the misty slope of Mount Olivet repeats itself daily. Broadly cast upon all the perspective of history are the ever-contrasted forms of the tireless, sleepless, struggling, overcoming Christ, and the palsied sleepers who fear or faint in the dark hour of the great and agonizing tribulation of the regeneration.

The Christian doctrine is that in the more than world-convulsing war between the great forces of good and evil Christ has overcome for man; that in that very Gethsemane and on the morrow's Calvary he won the victory for our human race; and thenceforth all history was reduced to a continuous struggle for the progressive application of the benefits already achieved—for the application, simply, of what he had already done for us. Our warning is limited to this.

But in every stage of this continuous struggle that goes on through the centuries the ancient scene is repeated to our view. If evil attacks good, if error and unbelief and selfishness make war upon truth and faith and devotion, it is Christ who suffers, it is Christ who wrestles, it is Christ who sweats the great blooddrops of his humiliation. And if good overcomes evil, if moral and religious progress is achieved, it is Christ who goes into the battle, it is he who conquers.

Now, what every individual needs primarily is a proper basal ground where he may stand that he may watch against the evil in defense of the good and true. And in Christ alone can this be found. Obliterate him from this "conflict of ages," and there is no solid ground on which to rest your feet. Where else will you seek such ground? In science? It can explore numberless physical and mental phenomena, but it can give no clew to the moral phenomena in which you are supremely interested. Its microscope cannot investigate the soul. Its telescope cannot reveal God. Its object is not virtue or holiness, but knowledge. Its character is not moral, but intellectual. Science is a result of mental processes, and, humanity being greater than its processes, science cannot save it.

Will you seek the ground for your life-watch in history? History is but an aggregation of facts and, at best, can only refer you to philosophy; and philosophy has never yet developed, from all the materials it has accumulated and all the data it has consulted, a complete, united system which, with any shadow of plausibility, can be called truth. Philosophy herself is all in doubt and confusion, having no faith by which to invite faith, no certitude, and utterly unable to say to any one man, "Come unto me,and I will give you rest."

If you apply to the human religions how much have you bettered yourself, what advance have you made? Will you hold your vigil with Confucius in the cloud of his unauthoritative and shadowy wisdom? Will you hold it with Buddha in the gloomy complacency of eternal torpor? Or with Mohammed in his senseless trifling with oriental extravagance and sensualism?

And when this round of human systems, disappointing and disheartening, has been completed, what a relief it is to hear the divine-human Sufferer of Olivet say, "Can ye not watch with me?" O, the heart-touching tenderness, the thrilling hopefulness, of that word "with me!" Here, at last, we may watch with and feel confidence in Him who is our champion, for here is everything to inspire our confidence—truth and power and love and dominion; here is Christ, so sweetly human, so strangely divine, watching for us, watching with us, rising into victory from humiliation, and opening heaven for us with his cross.

You are ignorant? He teaches you. You

are guilty? He forgives you. You are polluted? He cleanses you. You are weak? He strengthens you. You are comfortless? He makes his abode with you. You are poor? He is a sufficient treasure. You are sick and dying? He is the resurrection and the life. You take him to your heart—rather, he takes you to his own—your troubled mind sinks to rest, you cease seeking for your own good, and begin to seek for that of humanity. So he hangs the emblems of his divinity on the circles of the heavens. "Look unto me," he cries, "and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth." You look out upon the travail of the world, you await the result of the mediatorial struggle, and you know that Christ is all in all.

Now, under such circumstances, having reached such a vantage ground, it is natural for many to feel that the most important work on their part is done. Their sympathies are on the right side, they confide in the competence of Christ to overcome. They feel they are on the right ground; they have a well-appointed watch. They have caught new glimpses of the Master's divinity; they have seen how the winds and the waves obey him; they have come to repose an easy confidence in the sufficiency of the great Miracle-worker in every emergency. They are contented. They fall asleep. If they were the sworn enemies of Christ they would openly oppose him. If they were his dissembled enemies they would be astir to betray him. But they are neither. They are simply overcome by moral drowsiness. The keener sympathy of their nature is lulled asleep, and their moral vigilance seems to be lulled asleep with it.

And what if He who wrestles so mightily near by against every deadly enemy of man were also to lie down and sleep? What would become of their salvation, what would become of humanity, if the Saviour should grow weary of struggling in behalf of an indifferent or a hostile world, and slumber should close his eyelids, too? My brothers, shall we be prayerless while Christ is praying, heedless while he is watching, withdraw our sacrifices from his service while his sacrifice is a continual offering, let our eyes close in ill-timed weariness or easy confidence while the eyes of the ever-watchful Christ look out, fixed and intent, upon all the movements and marches and countermarches of opposing agencies in this world? The tireless energy that the Son of God and Son of man flings into the great conflict, and the glorious achievement that crowns it, will yet come back to the sleeping disciple with the reproach, "What, could ye not watch with me one hour?"

Is this an age to justify such apathy? Is it from modern infidelity the Church derives this listless example? Have the worldliness and wickedness and grossness of these times grown so indifferent and easy-going that Christian discipleship can afford to cry out into the night "All's well," and fall asleep at its post like a drunken watchman? No, this is not such an age. The world, however wicked, is wakeful and earnest—desperately earnest. It is thoroughly aroused to do what it can in its own defense. It coaxes and threatens, it laughs and frowns, it cries "Peace" and wages war; it plies its wiles, it bestirs itself, it puts on strength, goes out of its way in wickedness; it is at infinite pains to be in error. Something has touched it, has broken its lethargy forever. It seems to feel upon its face the breath of that prayer of agony of the Son of God.

And the terrible earnestness of that prayer has moved the world to its foundations. It is in all the elements, penetrating, infiltrating, and sifting through the spiritual atoms of humanity, setting the whole moral creation throbbing and quivering with its own earnestness. Those watching eyes of Gethsemane, that burn like fire through the darkness and through the battle night of ages, O how they search us! They look upon our work, they scan our motives, they interrogate us when we stand up to preach and when we kneel down to pray, they interrogate us in the house of God and in the marts of trade. There is no legitimate occupation which, if followed right along, in the sight of God, will not lead us into the presence of the wrestling Mediator, the lonely Watcher in the garden on the way to the cross and the tomb and the resurrection and ascension glory, and which will not lead on to that outpouring of the Holy Spirit and that baptism of fire upon the whole Church which he will send, even as the Father hath sent him into the world.

Or the disciple may be heavy with sorrow. He finds himself in a new position. It is not now as in the communion of that last supper when he feasted with his Lord; it is not now as when he walked and talked with him, and sang hymns in the ecstasy of his visible presence, ere yet they had reached the Mount of Olives. From all this he finds himself transferred to a new and strange ordeal. He shudders in the surrounding darkness of his way; he trembles at the trial near. And most disconsolate is he that he cannot see his Lord. Surely he is a Saviour that hideth himself.

Ah, brother, he hath gone "a little farther." He hath entered deeper into the councils of the Father than hast thou. But though thou canst not see him through the darkness, hearken, and thou shalt hear him praying for thee that thy faith fail not; praying, not that thou shouldest be taken out of the world, but kept from the evil, and at last be with him to behold his glory. Ah, Jesus is withdrawn from thee only about a stone's cast. He will come to thee. Let him not find thee sleeping. "What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter." And it is wonderful, sometimes, how short is the interval to that "hereafter," how soon those kind workings of his providence begin to display themselves.

A reflective author has said that with most men between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five or twenty-eight there are actually crowded more cares, changes, vicissitudes than in all their after years together; and adds that most persons, in taking a retrospect of life even at forty, are able to trace the divine benevolence in all the afflictive series. Perhaps the discovery is not so generally the case; but to Christian faith it sometimes requires no such lapse of years.

Yet I must allow that even the Christian sufferer does not often enter upon his sufferings with very distinct impressions of the mercies they conceal. The man of business does not see, when his fortunes go down and poverty and want come staring him in the face—he does not see that he may emerge from this sore trial with new knowledge and rejoicing with new joy that he hath in heaven a better and more enduring substance. The invalid does not know when he goes into the chamber of his long sickness what more than mortal healing is awaiting him there. The mother does not know, as she lays her child away in the dust, with its white hands folded and the flowers on its bosom—she does not yet understand how, through this aching void of her heart, the Saviour is preparing to come in with a sweeter presence and a deeper and holier communion.

These are the after-discoveries of faith, but to the Christian it does not usually take so very long to make them; while there are other revelations for which we must needs wait through the longer vigil of life. But they are sure to come to us in due time. Let us, then, not fear the darkness. Let us go forth with our Lord, from the feast to the watch in the olive shade. Enough, blessed Jesus, that thou art there, that what thou doest we shall know hereafter. We shall be kept from the evil. We shall behold thy glory at last with the Father. We can watch our little hour.

Besides our own personal sorrows, there may be occasions when the omens of the times portend evil to the Master and his mission; when the chief priests of corruption are at work, and the scribes come forth with their parchments, and the officers with their bludgeons, and intrigue is busy, and power is clamorous, and perfidy and perjury are greedy on the track of the Son of man. There have been many such occasions. But, O ye of little faith, know this—there is no contest into which the Christ is called to go but he emerges from it with new trophies of his power. So he returned from his contest with Roman idolatry, with Judaism, with numberless customs and institutions of pagan antiquity, with mediæval superstition, with papal tradition, with rationalism, with ecclesiastical oligarchies, with political confederacies with Satan—a series of victories embodying the great progresses of civilization.

So, too, he returned from his contest with the philosophic materialism of the eighteenth century; and the scientific materialism, so called, of the nineteenth century shows signs that it will only encounter the fate of its fallen predecessor. In like manner, its own speculative positions, though bold and brilliant, are being weakened at all the chief points of controversy and must eventually surrender at discretion; for, in the nineteenth century, the facts of matter have as surely failed to come to the support of materialism, under the name of science, as, in the eighteenth century, the laws of logic and metaphysics and moral reasoning refused to come to the rescue of materialism, under the name of philosophy. That, too, was a great movement in its day, but, like the wicked, it passed away, and lo, it was not.

To an intelligent Christian who has kept pace with the great controversy of recent years, in all its various lines of argument and evidence, the Christian outlook is continually brightening. The opposers having failed to turn a single fundamental Christian position, the era of suspicion and suspense must logically pass away. Individual skepticisms there will always be; but the position of the whole question at this time is wonderfully reassuring. I know we have some teachers among us who seem to fear lest they should be deemed uninformed and unscientific, and who are already so nearly panic-stricken that they appear ready at the first appearance of the enemy to haul down the flag, or at least to drop it to half-mast; but that is only because they have only half mastered the subject in controversy. They surrender to the enemy when they should have crippled his resources. Whether their sweeping admissions, made on their own authority, proceed from the preacher or the religious editor or the theological professor's address on Commencement Day, no one can any longer make such gratuitous concessions without impeaching his own scholarly intelligence. It is well to realize this fact; and a certain class of Christian apologists will soon find it out and have occasion to make apologies for themselves.

It was the necessity of Christianity that she should encounter stalwart enemies—brute-force persecution in one age, sophistical casuistry in another; in the eighteenth century philosophical materialism; scientific materialism, so called, in the nineteenth, beyond which we can conceive nothing more in the way of purely intellectual encounter. I say it was necessary, for the full disclosure of her divine evidences, that Christianity should receive these successive onslaughts, that she might demonstrate her ability to withstand them.

She is nobly doing so. And, when the opposition shall have expended its last effort and exhausted the whole measure of its resources, we may be sure that a divine Power always present in the world will order a halt all along the line, and that Christianity will be found standing on that grand vantage ground of complete authentication which she could never so fully occupy till then—in possession of the whole field, claiming the kingdoms of the earth for her Lord, authenticated to the intelligence of the whole earth by every crucial test which human ingenuity could devise, and glorious in the full-orbed splendor of nineteenth-century light.

Christ has always entered farther than the most sanguine of his followers into the awful privacies of his redemption work. He has ever rebuked the littleness of human faith, ever looked confidently, through darkness and mystery, to the inevitable triumph of the divine purposes. Did we not find it so in the emergency of our late civil war? What a "horror of darkness" was in that hour! Yet Christ was there; he was working, he never ceased working, till all lands sang a new song unto the Lord and the world was taken up into the arms of his Messiahship and lifted forward at least two hundred years. But these things are past; why refer to them now? Because the lesson may be needed some time; there may be other sorrowful, even bloody, contingencies when we shall need a faith strengthened for its watch with Christ by the recollection of his wonders past. Because the hour may be coming when our American Christianity, if not our American civilization, shall again have to say, "I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!"

But, whatever the emergency, remember that the Master will work and wrestle and prevail. He shrinks not from the conflict; but how it will grieve him to the very heart to come unto us and find us sleeping. And when he shall have lifted us to consummations beyond our utmost hope, consummations that shall make heaven and earth resound with his praise, shall we not be ashamed when he shall look at us with those soul-piercing eyes of his and say, "What, could ye not watch with me one hour?"

For the individual, for the Church, for the nation, it is safe to watch with Christ, safe to trust in him; not only safe, but sweet and blessed. O, the watchers with Christ have not such a gloomy station, after all. And, were the case otherwise, why should you hesitate? Hath not he gone farther on? He will find for you some more tranquil spot in the garden of sorrow and say, "Tarry thou here, and watch with me;" but into the inner recess he will enter alone. You shall indeed drink of his cup, but the dregs of its bitterness he will drink for you. You shall have your needful cross to bear, but the terrible cross of atonement shall be all his own. Can you not, will you not, make your life a loving, earnest vigil with Christ? It is so brief withal—only to trim your lamp for a short night watch before the splendors of an eternal day. Measured by eternity, by his awful agony for us, by the magnitude of the interests at stake, by the glorious results of his blessed atonement and our salvation, our watch with Christ is but one little hour.

VII

Christianity a Spiritual Warfare

"The weapons of our warfare are not carnal."—2 Cor. x, 4.

VII

Christianity a Spiritual Warfare

CHRISTIANITY is a spiritual warfare. The absolute spirituality of religion—how late and how toilsomely men come to the knowledge of this truth! By what a laborious route of zigzag advances, how fatigued with incessant failures or gropings by the way, they reach those serene Christian heights where the last errors of religious materialism disappear, and the calm, clear, pervading spirituality of religion stretches around them, boundless and pure as the heavens of God!

Study the Christian through the successive stages of his progress, and see how the same one error of religious materialism, or materialized religion, clings to him persistently at every transition. He pays his debts, he feeds the hungry, and seems almost to feel that this is enough. But this is not the divine element in religion—only the human. He does not thus serve and adore God in a spiritual sense. He rather serves man by works; and there is little in works that is not "of the earth earthy," little that is not essentially materialistic.

Does he grow ashamed of this and, though still earthly as ever, propose for himself a more spiritual experience? But how hard it is for him to overcome his native materialism! He will not believe unless in some way he can see and hear and touch. Insensible, dead to the spiritual world in its highest, deepest, and most glorious realities, his vaunted spiritism is only a begging materialism still.

Does he seek to rise to a higher plane through an earnest Christian activity? Well, if he rebuke not those who are guilty of casting out devils, but who follow not with him, if he do not waste his energies in useless contentions as to which particular form of Christianity shall be the greatest in the coveted glory, yet he is very long in learning the truth that the kingdom he would serve so zealously is "not of this world." Men will admit in the abstract that "an idol is nothing in the world," that Judaism is obsolete, that God is a Spirit to be worshiped in spirit and in truth; yet in passing upon a thousand matters pertaining to his service and involving the vital character of Christianity—that is to say, its real province, the means by which it works, the results at which it aims and in which it terminates—in all these respects the divine spirituality of this service is still too often unappreciated or ignored.

Yet to the necessities and contingencies of the purely spiritual life, I cannot but think, the system of Providence has been graduated from the beginning. The spiritual idea has been central in those great religious dispensations into which he has distributed the history of the world, and thence is taken up and centralized in the last and most silent operations of his grace in maturing the work of individual sanctification. Its propagation has been the labor of Providence; its establishment is the completion of religion.

Seems it almost an incongruity to specialize this spirituality in opening my remarks on a text that portrays the Christian life under the figure of a warfare? No, there is no incongruity here. For that warfare itself is waged against the prevalent materialism and sensualism of our nature, whether considered as carnal forces openly defying the authority of religion, or as the arbitrary and factitious quarrel of religion herself against the natural and harmless use and enjoyment of material things which cannot, within due limitations, justly provoke her criticism.

It is time to remember that religion can descend to such morbid solicitude about trivialities and externals and things indifferent as to lose herself in them, and thus distract the attention of men from that in which the kingdom of God really consists; or she can exaggerate some outward institution of her own, as an episcopacy or a baptism, to a position of such false importance in the Christian system as to distort the entire symmetry of that system and belittle the spiritual grandeur of its whole movement. In either such case she repeats the same fault and reproduces the very element she complains of; for what is all this but materialism in a religious form?

The Hindu devotee, self-tortured on the top of his pillar of which he almost becomes a part, painfully postured on single foot, mid heat and cold and storm, with cruel penances, fastings, and scourgings to mortify the flesh, while all the time he can think of nothing else, of course; and Jesus, eating and drinking with publicans and sinners in all the stainless purity of the Son of God—which of the two, will you say, gives us the true type of the spiritual man?

As this illustration shows, an exaggerated, morbid self-mortification is only an inverted materialism. It seeks through the flesh what can be accomplished only through the spirit. It is under bondage. It cannot know the liberty of the sons of God. "We are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh." You do not glorify the spiritual quality in religion by mixing it up with every ascetic, narrow notion which even good people may take into their heads. To defend spiritual Christianity in what it is we must first defend it from what it is not.

The time was when the struggle of religion had the appearance of a material struggle to an extent we can little realize at present; when in a rude age and an idolatrous world the very ground had to be prepared, most literally, for the reception of the worshipers of Jehovah. Why were the gorgeous nations of the earth passed by? Why was not Egypt chosen, rich and cultured and famous and influential? Why, from among the millions of Egypt, should a race of downtrodden and degraded slaves be elected to bear the vessels of the Lord and to fulfill the mission of the theocracy? Behold the panting, palpitating fugitives, with the pursuers at their back and the Red Sea at their feet. How easy were it for a sarcastic observer to exclaim, just then, "Ah, glorious theocracy, no doubt a brilliant history is opening before you, sparkling, in the coral depths of the briny sea!"

Behold them at a later stage; again theirs seems a forlorn hope indeed. They hold not so much as the ground that is necessary for the symbols of their religion to be planted upon. It must needs be conquered for them and then held against invasion, for they are a comparative handful, inclosed by the heathen nations in arms. How remarkable at such a juncture appears the divine prohibition of chariots and horses and alliances, the fundamentals of military strength! Never could Israel prevail by military force; but never could she be defeated by the want of it. Nay, reducing her swelling armies to the merest handful of subalterns and dismissing the rest to their homes, her God would make one chase a thousand, that so she might unceasingly acknowledge, "Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the Lord our God." "The Lord of hosts is with us."

These glimpses illustrate the whole history of Judaism. What did it mean? What lesson did God aim to teach his people for all ages to come?

Mark the transition from Judaism to Christianity. Who was the Founder of Christianity but the "Man of sorrows?" Who were its apostles but the simple-hearted fishermen? What was its history but crucifixion? What was its Church but a timorous band that looked out from a solitary chamber upon a bloodthirsty Judaism and the broad world of intolerant paganism? And what, meanwhile, was its propagating power or arm of defense but the solitary doctrine of Christ crucified—certainly, to all human view, the height of ill-timed fanaticism. Paganism had prestige and patronage. Paganism had caste and antiquity. It had fire and sword, too, if necessary. Its fascinating and sensual mythology cast a charm over the masses, while its subtle and mystical philosophy made it a power with the refined. How absurd, then, to take the name of Jesus, fresh from the charnel-ground of Jerusalem, make it the center of a new religious system that could succeed only by the radical subversion of the consolidated opinions and usages of ages, and project it against this whole array of fashion, patronage, and learning, the social, political, and religious order of the world! Yet how soon these yielded to the peerless name of Christ! No historic gleam that paganism could boast but paled before the matchless brilliancy of the Malefactor's name; no pagan philosophy but recoiled before what seemed the most humiliating and unnatural of doctrines—Christ and him crucified!

And when, in a later age, simple Christianity had degenerated into an ecclesiastical establishment where the truth, though not dead, lay buried, as in a splendid tomb, what was it but the liberated Bible that felled to the earth the man of sin at Rome; what was it but the great doctrine of the Reformation, justification by faith, charming above all the gaudiness of papal ceremonial and stronger than all the fulminations of papal fury? "The just shall live by faith," said the Reformers. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved," they said. That was all. But nothing could compare with it, nothing could approach it. What could the hierarchy do? In vain they burned incense upon altars venerable with the antiquity of a thousand years and burdened with the gold and silver of captive empires. In vain were the priestly incantations of the mass, the pealing symphonies of the choir. In vain were priest and cardinal and pope. In vain the grand old cathedrals stood, the Vatican thundered, the Inquisition reddened and ran with blood. In vain the art and pomp and power of the world alternately coaxed and cursed, smiled on heretics to-day and slew them in hecatombs to-morrow. Wiser than all their wisdom, richer than all their wealth, mightier than all their thunder, and sweeter than all their music, rose the simple word of faith that was able to save the world, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

There came another crisis. Spiritual life was nearly extinct in Europe. If the familiar descriptions of that general religious prostration, and of the great movement that followed, to many seem to be overdrawn, no less an authority than the historian Green has painted both in stronger colors than would be deemed befitting a Methodist pulpit. Openly had the boast been made that the Christian religion was at last dead; that nothing further was to be awaited but its final burial; that it must inevitably disappear in form, as it seemed almost to have disappeared in fact. The rationalistic mist had veiled the truth from Germany. In France infidelity and its attendant sensuality raged without restraint. And even England, satisfied with having fought the battle of her evangelical faith, had lain down to sleep away her evangelical life. In America affairs were scarcely more hopeful. The Revolution had left almost as little place for the English Church as for the British throne; its priesthood had retired, and its influence was scarcely felt as an actual presence in society; Calvinism, not modified then as now, was feebly promulgating a theory of unconditional decrees that aimed to exalt the divine sovereignty, but depressed the standard of human responsibility; the presence of foreign troops had sown the seeds of transatlantic infidelity, and already the field showed signs of a terrible harvest; while immigration was extending through the West its thousands of scattered families, destitute of religious ordinances or influences of any kind. Compared with that era, in either hemisphere, the present condition of Christendom might almost be called millennial.

Such was the state of things portrayed by impartial history when a few sincere, laborious, simple-hearted men went forth, under the derisive epithet of "Methodists," without prestige, without patronage, nay, mocked, mobbed, and hunted wherever they appeared, and equipped with only the simplest of Christian doctrines applied with all their experimental power. But how soon it appeared that these old doctrines had lost nothing of their divine efficacy; quickening the spiritual heart of England, beating back the French infidelity with one hand and the Germanic with the other, and implanting peace and gladness over the length and breadth of our own continent! These fervent men penetrated to our destitute frontiers with psalm and prayer and preaching, carrying in the van of our westward march, at every step, the Bible and the cross, until that mighty region—thank Heaven!—was rescued from the grasp infernal that was clutching at its moral heartstrings, and hill and valley reverberated from the Atlantic to the Pacific with the hallelujahs of a Christian civilization, a Christian land! Rejoice, O heavens; be glad, O earth! Again God's right hand and his outstretched arm had gotten him the victory.

Now this law, my brethren, of the supremacy of simple spiritual force. ever taking us by surprise, turning strength into weakness and weakness into strength, wisdom into foolishness and foolishness into wisdom, reversing natural order and confounding the conclusions of worldly sagacity—this law extends from the public and historic career of religion to the inner experience of the individual soul. It is no more operative in the vast aggregated mass of the whole Christian world than in the still recesses of the isolated Christian heart. While it must direct the energies, and determine the methods, and prescribe the aims of the Church at large in its great contest with the leagues of sin, it must dominate the struggles and regulate the growth of each separate Christian character. And it is especially significant that the inimitable description of the Christian armor which Paul has given in the Epistle to the Ephesians should be addressed to the Ephesian believers as individuals, and not as a collected and organized community.

You will observe that this description, with all its copiousness of amplification, is readily reducible to a few primary appliances of moral warfare, alike defensive and aggressive, with which the Christian warrior may guard the heritage of his Lord, and then hasten forward to the subjection of every adverse power to one harmonious spiritual kingdom.

First, truth—that deep, conscientious sincerity which ever regards the integrity of its own motive, preparing the soul, thus, for the reception of the divine will, according to the promises, "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine;" "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord." Next, faith—an earnest, practical confidence in the sufficiency of the divine word, the sword of God's right hand, with a keen edge for every error and a ready stroke for every foe; the sword of the Spirit—not, therefore, to be wielded apart from him and independently of him, but as subordinate to him; the Spirit's sword for the assertion of the Spirit's living law, wielded this way or that, as he listeth, even as the hero is greater than the sword; in brief, the divine word as interpreted by the Spirit to a true and honest heart. Then, prayer, looking away from every inferior resource and making the direct appeal to God. Multitudes have proved that in pursuance of processes so simple as these their alienation from God has ceased, strongholds have yielded, high towers have been cast down. Myriads have proved this; ages have set their seal to it.

And so, with a confidence born of experience, men have too much trusted in these processes and vaunted these agencies, and in proportion as they have begun to glory in the means the results have ceased and the means become of no effect. The means have no intrinsic efficacy. If I trust in the abstract power of prayer, I might as well pray to a stone. If I make my faith the object of my faith, I might as well believe in Mohammed as in Christ. If I shut up my confidence within the lids of the Bible, I might as well read the *Shasters* of the Asiatic as the epistles of Paul. The efficacy of the means is of God. If we seek it outside of him, it makes little difference where we seek it; one direction is about as good as another. They are the instruments of his power, but in themselves inert as iron. They are the mirror of his glory; remove the reflected object, and the mirror stands a blank.

This explains so many things. There was not a serpent-bitten, dying Israelite but knew, the moment his glazing eyes were glaring on the uplifted brazen form he was to look upon, "This cannot save me." The Syrian leper knew, every time of the seven he went down into the Jordan, "This cannot save me." The blind man must have felt, the instant the clay touched his recoiling eyeballs, "This cannot cure me." But, when life and power and healing came, they all said, "God hath done it." Do you think God would give us means of moral salvation that would leave us the power to declare anything less than that? Do you think the testimonies of redemption through the Gospel are to be struck in a lower key than the testimonies of the wilderness and the Jordan, that the Power which restores the soul will surrender its glory to another? But "God hath done it" shouts every sinner saved by grace. And so, as fast as they are saved, they will keep on filling the world with the music of the joyful song, "God hath done it;" and, blessed be his name, the world is becoming filled with such melody.

One of the great besetting religious blunders of our time is this—that men will insist on coming to God only by means that have a supposed intrinsic, inherent tendency to bring them to God, that are supposed to have an essential power to produce religious results, by processes that are supposed to be the natural, rational causes of benefits really conferred only through them. This is pure rationalism, in its most practical form; as if men could build up a kind of staging by which they could ascend to salvation by their own natural moral locomotion. They say, "Follow the example of Christ, and you are saved, of course." Of course you are—but how? Their saying this is only begging the question, simply telling you to begin where you will be happy indeed if you end. They make out long moral prescriptions and say, " Take this, and your soul shall live, for this compound contains every imaginable ingredient of spiritual life." They advise any amount of morality, any amount of devotion, any amount of example—anything but the Gospel and its salvation.

A natural causative connection between the means and the result—this is what they seek, even if they have to invent the necessary result. Now, right against this I venture to say that the evident natural inapplicability of the means of salvation to accomplish salvation by themselves is doubtless one reason in the divine plan for their selection. Otherwise, would not men be continually mistaking the means for the end ? Even now they are not altogether prevented from making this mistake, so strong is the tendency to it.

The rationalist or the free religionist sometimes says, " There is power in prayer ; therefore I will pray. It elevates my soul by holy associations ; it refines my nature." And he prays—to his own soul ; and his own soul grants him, probably, such answer as he gets. Shutting out God, he makes himself both the subject and the object of his petitions. He seeks the ground of efficacy in himself and in his works. The Romish Church makes the efficacy of the sacrament to reside in the intention of the priest, but, in reparation, proffers the literal body of Christ. Amid the most solemn pomp of worship, with a devout awe scarcely to be found elsewhere, the papist kneels and says, "This priest and this wafer, become the literal body of the Lord—how mighty is this sacrament!" and goes forth from the most stately celebration of the vital doctrine of the atonement the forms of religion can know—goes forth, too often, as unbenefited, unblest, as thoroughly alienated from the life of God as before his knees had trembled in the celebration of the mass. He makes an idol of the means.

But when you ask us, "What is the natural relation or connection, according to your system, between the means and the result?" we tell you frankly that we do not need any such relation. If we knew of any, we should hardly dare use it. We say both to the rationalist on the one hand and the ritualist on the other that our prayer is nothing, our faith is nothing, our Bible and sacraments are nothing; they have no efficacy or power at all of themselves; they are "mighty through God," and through him only. Not that we despise the means. We cannot live without bread; but the living bread cometh down from heaven. We cannot fight without weapons; but the sharpness of the sword and the strength of the shield and the glory of the helmet are of God.

I cannot give you a philosophical reason for the existence of any natural connection between the means and the results, between the weapons and the victory; but I can give you a moral reason why there should be none, and moral reasons are the philosophy of God. Sin has lost us the divine presence. By nature we are "without God in the world," in whom, nevertheless, "we live, and move, and have our being." And now to our darkened faculties, lo, nature erects the awful barriers of her inexorable materialism, beyond which we catch no vision, we hear no voice; nature asserts, from the relentless uniformity of her fixed, despotic laws, "I am all, I am being, there is no beyond." The things of sin and sense assert themselves to our affections, swayed by the common materialism, saying, "We are all there is of happiness, there is nothing beyond; eat and drink, for to-morrow ye die."

Yet despite all these barriers of matter and sense God has called us. Up through them, as through a dark mine leading into light, he is drawing us with the drawings of a Father. The Father seeks his children. "For we must needs die; . . . neither doth God respect any person: yet doth he devise means, that his banished be not expelled from him." What means would he devise, think you? Means calculated to mislead us on our way and divert us to themselves and make us stop short of the goal? Never, when that goal is a Father's presence, a Father's heart.

We are surrounded by all this materialism and assaulted by all this sensualism of nature, but we are exile children fighting our way home; and through God we shall reach it. We shall see this long battle fought out to the very end, and shall rise by a spiritual victory to the worship that has "no temple" and the "house not made with hands," and the city which the glory of God doth lighten, for "the Lamb is the light thereof." It is time for the Church to say in her heart what she says in her creed, "I believe in God."

"For the weapons of our warfare are not

carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds." What are these weapons? Everything that is of the Spirit—the faith that looks up to him, the Scriptures in which you search for him, the prayer of want you breathe into his ear, the loving word you pour into the sinner's heart. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord." Brethren, that is power, that is might almighty; and nothing less will give us victory in this war. God means we shall have the Spirit in gracious fullness.

The war with atheistic or agnostic materialism is drawing toward its end, and, you may depend upon it, the next battle is to be the battle of the Spirit. Many are asking what is to be the final outcome of the great effort which skepticism is making against the religion of the Bible. So far as that effort is merely speculative—and it is very largely so—it will ultimately dwindle into insignificance, for people weary, after a while, of unsupported theories and assumptions. So far as that effort appeals to any definite test or evidence it is largely answered from the Christian side already, and that answer, we believe, will go on to completion.

But is God, then, going to give up the whole work of vindicating and establishing his truth into the care of any intellectual agencies or argumentative methods, as such? If he were to do so, it would be a departure from the whole line of his providence hitherto. The history of religion will not let me believe it. Light is coming, help and victory and salvation are coming, but they are coming in a way that disbelievers little suspect and that some Christians too little hope for. Even while I speak there are tokens that the dispensation of the fullness of the Spirit is hovering over the earth. If the American Church will only arise now, and truly live to God, and let him accomplish his own counsels in her and by her, there is not a plague of infidelity or intemperance or dishonesty or any other plague now in the land but God will arise and consume it with the brightness of his coming. That is how he will destroy the evil—with the shining of the sun of his righteousness, with a general burst and baptism of Gospel glory, purifying and beautifying the whole land and resting upon all classes of people.

Have faith in God. Have faith in the

kingdom that is not of this world. And believe that he holds by their right hand the weakest who have learned of him to say, "Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen."

VIII

The Great Plaudit

"Well done."—Matt. xxv, 23.

VIII

The Great Plaudit

A TRIUMPH—how welcome, how delightful it is! No matter if it be of little consequence, we rejoice in it still. No matter though the thing achieved be somewhat trivial, we have defeated difficulties, we have vanquished obstacles, we have triumphed, and we celebrate our little victory with enthusiasm. Every day brings its petty difficulties and triumphs, interspersed occasionally with those that are greater. And even these little conquests over commonplace trials and perplexities are enough to fill us with very complacent emotions—indeed, with heartfelt satisfaction.

But here in the text is indicated what may be termed a life-triumph. I call it so because it implies the accomplishment of the great ends for which life was instituted, the realization of the highest destinies in human possibility; for our text expresses the plaudit of Almighty God, approving the man who, in the moral stewardship of life, has conquered, has succeeded.

As we learn from the chapter before us, and from the whole system of the Scriptures, the present life is a probation for the blessedness of another. It is a stewardship, in which each person is intrusted by his divine Lord with certain talents or endowments, to be cultivated, invested, and applied according to the divine will; as the final result of which, after due examination, the diligent steward receives the plaudit, "Well done, good and faithful servant," and is exalted to the joy of his Lord, while the slothful and unprofitable servant is cast into outer darkness, weeping and gnashing his teeth. Such is the view we derive from the Scriptures of human life, its plan of discipline, its results. And it is a view which is essential to the whole system of the Scriptures, the center of all their teaching.

Probation is trial. It presupposes, therefore, the existence of opposing possibilities, without allowing by this that it involves any incitement to sin or any necessity that the soul should sin. It is a trial appointed in order that the soul, by the voluntary exercise of its own powers, may rise to a higher moral character and perfection than could be originally impressed upon it by creative power. As the soul, by the voluntary and proper exercise of these natural and, relatively, perfect powers is disciplined and rises to higher and higher planes of goodness, so, by perverting these faculties, it sinks to a lower plane, and thus ultimately into sin, like our first parents; and this is as far as the human mind has ever reached, or probably ever will reach in this world, toward solving the vexed question of the origin of sin.

Moral probation or trial must, therefore, be compounded of opposite elements, and must concede the possibility of choosing between opposite courses of conduct, to one or the other of which the soul inclines, ascending or descending at each step toward the final maturity of its character, according as it allows the higher faculties to dominate the lower or the lower to dominate the higher, and so reaching on to a moral reward or punishment beyond the trial itself; for otherwise it were no trial at all, no probation at all.

Two requisites are essential to a probation: first, it must have a definite object in view; and secondly, it must have a limit in point of time, a termination. An eternal probation is an absurdity in terms.

If we suppose man's probation to be continued in a future life we must suppose a choice between two courses of conduct still possible there; there must, on the one hand, be helps to holiness, and there must, on the other hand, be liabilities to sin; there must be opportunity, as now, for attaining the former, and there must be opportunities for gratification, as now, in pursuing the latter; the one course must afford room for the exercise of the moral and spiritual faculties, the other must afford both room and means for the exercise of the natural passions and appetencies, in order that there may be opportunity for self-discipline, in order that there may be such a trial as the soul needs for the highest development of its own powers, and such as it is actually subjected to in the present life.

If the present life, however, with all its encouragements to righteousness and dissuasions from sin, does not avail, what assurance have we that a second probation would be availing, since, as we have seen, it would be a probation still, with all the essential conditions of the present probation merely perpetuated? But who knows that the future, the invisible, the eternal world is so modeled after the present world as to serve as the scene of immediate and direct conflict between contending influences? Who can tell us how these influences operate there, how they come into collision? Does virtue struggle there? Is piety beset by difficulty still? Is its success never certain?

But, supposing a continued probation, it might be reasonably inferred that the soul found incorrigible in the present life would remain equally so in the next. Or are we to understand that the influences increase on the side of piety, and diminish on the opposite side? But why, then, the severer discipline of the present life? Why the sterner process required for our purification here? Why not give over all thought of acquiring a spiritual character here, tear down our churches, ridicule religious instruction, cast off restraint, and wait till we reach some future state where the altered conditions of probation shall leave the attainment of holiness an easy and indifferent achievement, and where those who have attained it by heroic struggle up the steep heights of self-denial shall meet the pitying smile of their more fortunate neighbors who have reached the same happy summit with equal certainty and with so little trouble?

I would like to inquire in what state or condition the soul will be during its future trial for purification, where it will be neither saved nor lost and, consequently, neither in heaven nor in hell? Where will it be, then—in some Roman Catholic or Protestant purgatory? What I submit is that no advocate of a future probation should ever flaunt in the face of a good Roman Catholic the absurdity of his Romanistic purgatorial dogma.

But if the second trial, with its increased lenity, should fail to answer the purpose there may be a third—since every probation must have an end—a third, more lenient still. And if the third should be equally unsuccessful we may be accommodated with a fourth, or with forty, or forty thousand. The idea is very progressive, for these theorists, having eternity on their hands, are never at loss for want of time. And so probation may follow probation till all get safely established in the life of righteousness without a single stroke of self-denial, and are victoriously crowned in heaven—victors over nothing at all. What a heaven it would be at last! And what an admirable system, indeed, for persuading mankind to resist the allurements of sin and deny themselves in this present life of temptation! What myriads of converts to a pure and spiritual religion a man might make, I imagine, going through the land—as, God forgive them! men dare and do go through the land—proclaiming to every man he meets, whether in a sanctuary or a den of thieves, that another probation holds out this hope! Put away the miserable delusion. Revelation pronounces it false, and reason accuses it of folly.

The truth is, the moment you let go of the principle that the issues of salvation are limited to the present life you sacrifice the truth which gives supreme value and dignity and moment to life; you tear the very heart out of the Bible; you make its promises and threatenings, its rewards and punishments, frivolous, if not meaningless; you take from struggling virtue its staff of strength, and from vice the rod of its terror, and all that is religiously good and pure and sacred in society trembles on its weakened foundations. I lift my voice with these heavenly pages, and warn you against the delusion. I warn you by their authority that if you reject the offer the present life affords of becoming reconciled to God you lose your only opportunity; for "behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." Awake, arise! for there is work on your hands, and "the night cometh, when no man can work."

Life is a state of trial and of danger. We know not what its issues shall be. Every person, unless confirmed in the most dangerous error, walks the earth under the habitual impression that his ultimate destiny as a moral being is problematical. If an irreligious man, whatever he may believe, he cannot escape from this suspense. If a Christian, working out his salvation with fear and trembling amid the hostile influences of the world, he feels the same uncertainty. The witness of the Spirit simply testifies his acceptance to-day, not for to-morrow. He may believe in the final perseverance of the saints; but this does not assure him of his own salvation, for in the hour of temptation he is more inclined to doubt his own conversion than presumptuously to assume that he will be inevitably saved. The common objection which Methodism used to allege against the doctrine of perseverance was certainly a mistaken one. The tendency of the doctrine, instead of being to presumption and over self-confidence, is to excessive doubt; its ordinary experience is a liability to despondency.

Trial and danger, then, are characteristics of human life. But if life be devoted to religious watchfulness and constant sacrifice, conquest is certain. Thus the Christian discharges his stewardship, dispirited, it may be, by much within, by more without, tempted, buffeted, dying unto sin daily, but happily not looking upon this world as the land of his rest. He desires "a better country." Its rest and happiness, he knows, will abundantly repay his present labor and tribulation. And still, through all the weakness and vicissitudes of his spiritual progress, you may hear him reverently singing,

"When thou, my righteous Judge, shalt come
To take thy ransomed people home,
Shall I among them stand?
Shall such a worthless worm as I,
Who sometimes am afraid to die,
Be found at thy right hand?"

Yes, the wisdom of the Christian's choice will be indicated at length, and the faithfulness of his career will be rewarded, by just two words—"Well done!" Yes, it comes at last. He is summoned to give an account of his stewardship. We may not linger on the solemn circumstances of that interview, but we know how it will end. It will be summarized in just two words—"Well done!"

And what will this approbation import? It will mean that he has achieved the mission of life. He has been faithful to its responsibilities, he has vanquished its temptations, he has triumphed over its perils, he has accomplished its ends. He has been successful not merely in some single leading enterprise of life, but in the whole life. His is a life-triumph that crowns his whole existence, past, present, and to come, with a signal and universal victory.

Ah, he stood on dangerous ground. There were foes against him. There were dangers around him. Angels, looking down in suspense from the realms of the invisible, could not foretell the result. And now suspense is at an end. He has triumphed over all. He says not merely, "I have won this field," "I have laid that empire under tribute," "I have conquered such a continent," but he cries with pardonable exultation, "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." And God answers with his approval, "Well done!"

When shall the Christian receive this plaudit? When he shall most keenly feel the need of it; when mortal life is past, when the rush of worldly excitement is over, when the hush, the pause, of eternity is come. Yes, when the praises of worldly fame have grown silent upon his ear, when all earthly pomp has crumbled and is forgotten, he will hear the approving voice of his Lord, and will wear "the crown that fadeth not away." Monarchs would give their empires, if they had them now, and heroes their laurels, and philosophers their fame, and statesmen their glory, to stand where he stands—in the smile of his Lord, approved in the moral stewardship of life, victor through all eternity.

"Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors." But it is not your Lord that stands before you, veiled in flesh, to reenter his own realm in his own eternal right. It is not some heavenward angel that comes home from some loving mission to your glittering portal and claims entrance by virtue of his own immaculate purity. No, it is a man that stands before you—a man who, in fear and weakness, fettered with flesh and blood, from yonder world of mysteries and sorrows and temptations, where hell charged upon his soul in its hours of darkness, has come as a kindred spirit to claim fellowship and find a home in "the palace of angels and of God." Have ye a place for humanity? Hear the answer in the words "Well done!" and in the greetings of the sons of God! "Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors," and let this redeemed heir of glory in.

"Well done"—blessed, blessed words! —what triumph dwells in the sound! They tell us of death overcome; they tell us of dangers past; they tell us of sufferings that never can return; they tell us of the divine approval; they tell of happiness secure; they tell of a great company who stand before the throne of God waving high victorious palms and singing, "Hallelujah! we have overcome by the blood of the Lamb and the word of our testimony."

My Christian brother, will you stand in that victorious company? "He that endureth to the end shall be saved." You have conquered some temptations, you have won some victories. Will you be faithful unto death, and wear the crown of life, and sing at last, "I have overcome?"

And you, votary of the world and of sin, will you stand in that conquering host? Does your way look as if it is leading you there? Are you learning that song? Do you hear that "Well done," like a voice of peace from heaven, in the recesses of the morning motive and the evening memory? When the day is past and gone, do you hear it? When the old year is past and gone, do you hear it? When the years of life shall all be past and gone, will you hear it? What can life bring you at last worth the having, unless it bring you a triumph like this? What will it profit you to travel the brightest road of worldly ambition up to the bar of God, only to hear it said at your coming, "Thou slothful, thou unprofitable servant?" What if the world should cast out your name and revile you, were you to become a Christian? Do you not know that there is a reckoning day coming, when God's monosyllables will be mightier than the thunders of all time, and the godless verdicts of history will be reversed in the twinkling of an eye? At present you are concerned for the world's applause; in some coming hour, how your heart will ache with the longing to hear the approval of God!

I have thought that when it comes my time to die I would like to hear again sweet voices I have loved to hear. I would like, when these eyes grow dim amid the mortal shadows, to see around me certain faces I have loved to see. But most of all do I desire, when speech and hearing and vision fail as life's solemn trust falls from my palsied hand, that my soul may see the form of my loving Saviour bending over me and hear him whisper, "Well done." The music of that word shall be the keynote of our song in heaven, as, with the great company of the redeemed, we stand before the throne and lift our glad voices in hallelujahs to the Lamb.

IX

Christ's Sovereignty Over the Human Heart

"Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?"—John iv, 29.

IX

Christ's Sovereignty over the Human Heart

So far as the memorable conversation at the Well of Sychar is recorded, the things which Christ had told the woman of Samaria in relation to her personal history, however startling, were few—too few to furnish ground for such a sweeping description; and it has, therefore, been supposed that the conversation is but partially recorded. I doubt the need of the supposition for the purpose for which it is offered. Her words might have been no less emphatic under the sudden quickenings of memory and conscience, as they were aroused by the religious truths that Jesus announced, superadded to his evident cognizance of her heart.

But, whether it was by the personal or the doctrinal disclosures addressed to her, or, as more likely, by the union of both, that the effect was produced on her mind, that effect is clear. The result of all was an impression of herself as being brought into judgment; confronted by an agency at whose presence time and distance and all the barriers to knowledge rolled away like smoke-wreaths before a whirlwind; by one possessing an unearthly cognizance of her heart and history, and from that hour accepted in his proper character; for it was the affirmation of faith, rather than the question of doubt, with which she closed her appeal to her countrymen, "Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?" So did she become, as she has been styled, the first Christian apostle of Samaria—a memorable instance of Christ's Messiahship over the human heart.

As it is to this sovereignty I wish to direct your attention, let us begin with this familiar form of it—that Christ, by his Gospel, is a powerful discoverer of the wickedness of the heart. His execution of this office is astonishing in view of the formidable difficulties to be encountered. Every member of the confederacy of sin recoils from every charge of infraction of the divine law—at least, of any such infraction as would leave the heart depraved and helpless before God. For men will claim they have kept his law in general, when repeated violations testify against them, and unnumbered transgressions are held to be only exceptional deviations from the general course of an upright life. The publican in the temple smiting his breast and praying with uplifted eyes, "God be merciful to me a sinner," and Simon Peter by Lake Gennesaret confessing, "I am a sinful man, O Lord"—both are characteristic of the conscience aroused by a sense of guilt and condemnation—the very opposite of what is called, very properly, the natural man, secure in his own righteousness or regardless of all righteousness.

Now, what is the secret of this natural resistance to the influences of righteousness? It is the consciousness of wrong which, in a measure, the Gospel has already produced. It is so in a degree even when men are most unawakened and self-secure in their unrighteousness. True, many will not come to the light, lest their deeds should be reproved; yet "whatsoever doth make manifest is light," and the Gospel, even in its fainter manifestations, in its comparative distance—while they fly from its light—does convince them that their works are not wrought in God and that their character is not conformed to his righteousness.

Thus, while the mind may plead not guilty, and with some show of sincerity, too—the sincerity of voluntary prejudice and error—yet there is, at the same time, a manifestation to the conscience, a deeper action of the heart, not intense or violent, but a sullen admission of the truth in recesses almost beyond its self-inspection. There is often such a double or conflicting action in the heart, such a contradiction inwardly between what is ephemeral or superficial and what is real and deep and abiding in our nature. And in such a heart God never fails to lodge that testimony that leaves all men convinced, though a thousand opposing tendencies may dispute its entrance and deaden the spiritual hearing. And if the unrighteous man seem to retain his complacency under every divine protest, retain it even in the hour of death, then it is the resistless shock of a coming judgment that must upheave the lighter and shallower layers of his self-righteousness and leave the profoundest strata of his moral consciousness exposed, all written over with the law of God and marred with the abrasions of sin.

We are in the habit of calling the body

the outward, and the soul the inward, man. But the soul has a similar distinction in itself. How true it is that, while the outward man, the one that seems and appears to talk and wrangle, is often left in ignorance and self-deception, Christ does find and converse with the deeper man of the soul and tell him all things that ever he did!

Why is it that persons who strive so hard to maintain a character of general rectitude and, as they imagine, of obedience to God are never found even approximating true religious happiness or satisfaction? Why is it that all their attempts at righteousness kindle no flame of joy, or even of emotion, through some occasional appropriation of the glorious promises of immortality? Is it not because Christ has met them outside the city of their self-righteousness and held discourse with the deepest heart, discourse which they cannot forget and of which they retain a silent and gloomy impression? "Ye worship ye know not what" is the truth that confounds them; and every approach to religious confidence and the blessedness of hope is checked by those deep discoveries he has made to them of themselves.

But we know there are multitudes to whom these discoveries are more fully made, multitudes from whom the Gospel tears away, as with an almighty hand, the last and least pretense of righteousness or of apology for sin. I have said that the secret of this resistance to right is the consciousness of wrong which the Gospel instantly produces; and it is equally true in certain conditions that the more this resistance accumulates the more this consciousness is intensified. By this very opposition the Gospel discovers to the soul its own exceeding enmity. For that is an experience true to the very letter which Paul puts into the mouth of a sinful man complacently pursuing the way of wrong until suddenly overtaken by the law of God: "I had not known sin, but by the law. . . . For without the law sin was dead. For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. . . . Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good." It is the man himself who is at fault.

The sinful passions which we should naturally suppose would repel the Gospel at once and leave it an object of indifference cannot actually do so. They are immediately interested in it—profoundly interested. Why? The answer reveals a singular feature of the Gospel influence. Why are they interested, even to antagonism, instead of remaining simply indifferent to it? Because the laws of the Gospel to which they find themselves opposed are such as evidently ought to control them; because they have their foundation in nature, though withstood by nature; because they are made by the same power that made man; because they carry an evident reasonableness, purity, and authority that leave the opposer confounded by his own opposition.

How many well-authenticated cases of combined interest and opposition are on record! A man pursues a life of quiet infidelity, is a disbeliever in all religion, though a very indifferent disbeliever, until his wife becomes a Christian. He never regarded religious matters before; but now when she prays he blasphemes. While she loves and forgives he raves. The more she serves God the more the demon in him is aroused. He is wrought upon by fury, threatens her life if she attends a certain meeting, is fully resolved to take her life—for she has gone. His eyes flash, his face is distorted, he paces the room in a frenzy of passion; hesitates, irresolutely; his face is deathly white, the beaded drops start from his brow, he stands and trembles as in the grasp of a giant. What is this? Some unearthly power is telling him all things that ever he did; the great deep of his life's iniquity is broken up before him at last. Down upon his knees now—" God be merciful to me, a sinner"—and his wife's return finds him happily converted to God and the lion becomes a veritable lamb. Blessed be God who has converted a multitude of atheists in this very way, who breaketh the bow and spear in sunder, and turneth the weapons of the adversaries against themselves, bringing forth from the deepest trials of the Gospel the highest triumphs of its power!

A chief element of this heart-discovering power of the Gospel is its wonderful power of suggestion. Each precept suggests an underlying principle, and the principle is boundless in its operation. The cup of cold water means charity, and charity is pure love to God and man. Each doctrine conducts you into the presence of unchangeable truth. Each precept or doctrine or duty or grace of religion refers you to the spirit of religion, and this is nothing less than universal holiness. God speaks in all, eternity is at stake in all, and whenever the least of them convinces you of sin you are God's prisoner, arrested by his own representative.

If the Gospel says, "Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God," every hidden motive of your heart is laid bare. If it prescribes its Golden Rule, a thousand dark infractions of its morality burst into view in its golden light. When it whispers, "Give an account of thy stewardship," all life's wasted years look back upon you. Does it say, as to the woman of Samaria, "God is a spirit," what mixture of worldliness with devotion, what heartlessness and formalism and vanity, stand impeached before the sincerity and simplicity of the Gospel!

Take any of these Scriptures—or take such Scriptures as these: "Give me thine heart;" "Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life;" "Ye are not your own" —I say, take any of these, and it instantly impresses you. But dwell on it, linger before it. What is its effect now? It presently begins to show a suggestive, recalling power you can hardly arrest or retard. It carries a sense of conviction far beyond the starting point to ground you never supposed that it had access to. It is a signal which summons accusing memories, that sweep backward into the past, and dart into the recesses of the heart, and drag its deepest secrets into light. A slumbering, but risen and avenging conscience hurries to and fro through the length and breadth of your life's domain, citing its motives, its responsibilities, its possibilities and achievements and neglects, and massing them against you as witnesses to every charge. You suddenly find that the law you thought so narrow is exceeding broad; there is nothing hid from the light thereof. It has your whole heart, your whole history, in its power. It tells you all things that ever you did, and all the things you have failed to do, searches out the controlling motives of your whole life, and reveals the secret springs of character.

And in thus exposing the sinfulness of the human heart, the Gospel likewise exposes its fears and its apprehensions. No sinful human heart exists without such fears and apprehensions. Indeed, the principle of fear was divinely implanted in our nature with this practical end in view—that through it we might be led to shun all physical harm and moral wrong-doing, which tend only to pain and sorrow and unavailing remorse. There are times when, even in the strongest nature, it does almost seem to drop this benevolent character, and to tyrannize and torture and rack the mind with imaginary, but unspeakable, horrors. Yet even then you cannot always control its presentiments, its forebodings, its nameless forecastings of dreadful fate and impending calamity, its dim and shadowy impressions flitting darkly through scenes of gayety, like birds of evil omen through a sunny sky. But when the mysterious elements thunder and flash from the rolling blackness over your head you attribute your emotion, not so much to questions of bodily safety, as to the terrifying manifestation of mighty forces uncontrollable by human will, and to the awfulness of future destiny, and, if unsaved, to an irrepressible sense of sin and guilt.

Somewhere in the nature of things there must be a foundation for all this; and you reach it when you strike the moral domain. When that intense consciousness of sin we have been noticing develops itself in a man no bravado on earth can make him believe that his fear is a groundless farce. To him it has a meaning; it has an object. It is a monition from an infinite Power arrayed against all unrighteousness and ungodliness of men.

There is a "mist of darkness" inwrapping that ultimate question which is above all other questions. There is in the conscience of guilt "a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation." This is not theory, but history—the history of millions of men, in all the strength of their rational faculties and in all the prejudice of sin. Men who would hardly shrink from any other encounter on earth recoil from encountering the Gospel. I doubt if any of the kings and heroes of all time ever made so many human hearts quake with fear as have actually trembled at the simple name of Jesus. But he has told them in a moment all things that ever they did. They have been overwhelmed with the disclosure, though made to no one under heaven but themselves, which shows it was at him they trembled. Why is the human soul thus overwhelmed? Because in the Gospel of Jesus Christ it hears his voice and pleads guilty to his accusation.

And the benevolent object of all this varied working is expressed in that holiest beatitude, "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God." Where the soul turns to him through his Son it finds, strangely enough, that its need of pardon, of cleansing, of fellowship, of a Saviour, a Comforter—all is anticipated; a divine foresight has provided for all these necessities of the heart's new spiritual experience before the heart could feel them.

We find another instance of the sovereignty of the Gospel in its power to discover the hopes of the human heart. I know that so far as they have a purely spiritual character or object they may be considered its creation, rather than its discovery; but it is true, nevertheless, that, however undirected or misdirected, however unspiritual and unpractical, still these longings for a good not possessed, these imaginings of bliss, these outgoings after some sweet, satisfying, but far-off happiness are the instincts of universal humanity. Throughout the pagan world these hopes either bruise their wings against the barriers of that dark, impenetrable fate which seems to wrap it round and sink down in despair, or terminate in a vague anticipation of a sensual immortality. Among the irreligious people of Christian lands they wing a varied flight, now fluttering among the toys of sense and passion, now sweeping up into the glimmer of a poetic idealism; sometimes turning a doubtful wing toward a truer sky, but quickly faltering and falling under the weight of their own earthliness.

Why is it that hopes so sweet are still so sad, that faces which seem naturally the impersonations of hope are almost inseparable from the tearful eye? Why is it that man in his freest attribute cannot be free, cannot be himself; that the freest of all his faculties, the hope that "springs eternal in the human breast," must spring at the call of phantoms that reward with tears, till the brightest wing of hope casts a shadow of despair?

Let a man repent and believe the Gospel, and he will know the answer. He will learn then that there has existed a moral barrier all the while to the exuberance and blessedness of hope—something in the way between him and the glorious good for which he was created. In those wonderful fruitions which the Gospel either concedes to the heart here, or reveals to its faith in the hereafter, the converted man sometimes starts with surprise to recognize the earliest and fondest longings of his soul, now at last embodied in real, rational, and holier forms, till even the thought of everlasting life no longer makes a man abashed, because the love of God shed abroad in his heart prepares and qualifies him for his heavenly citizenship.

And thenceforth the deepest yearnings, the highest imaginings, that the enthusiasm of enraptured moments ever knew or ever projected into the great unknown of human capacity and destiny can never surpass their heavenly archetypes, already authenticated by a spiritual foretaste. He is exalted by these assurances of immortality, these divine communings, these glory-glimpses—not beguiling and disappointing him, like the dreams of his former earthliness; not floating around him, like a mockery, receding at his approach and traced only by the track of darkness they leave behind; but drawing near and abiding with him in actual realizations that thrill him with triumph to think he is a man, and make him leap for joy to pass the glowing curtain of eternity.

Why did he not appreciate all this before? Why did he not understand the longings of his own heart? In the deepest and fondest experiences of life why did music's spell and love's communion and the ecstasy of joy suggest no higher possibilities, or only suggest visions wherein fancy might revel, but reason must not confide? Seasons and events that once merely filled his soul with musing and longing—when spring came with gushes of gladness, and summer waved its luxuriant foliage; when the dawn and the sunset kindled their visions of beauty; when the spirit of majesty hovered upon the mountains, and the sea, like a troubled child, had rocked itself to sleep; when the midnight sky whispered of a far-off calm, or the sick bed yielded its troubled dream of rest; when the grave awakened his longings for unsundered companionship and immortal communion—why at such times did he not perceive that somewhere were realities corresponding to these, that somewhere were objects of rational hope that could arouse the enthusiasm of the heart without violating the soberness of the understanding? Why did he not leap for joy, and exult in these significant voices, as the living prophets of his soul, when they raised their sublime strains under the sanction of the Almighty? Because no divine Power had interpreted to him the mysteries of his heart, had yet explored its depths with the light of the Gospel of hope, and explained its longings and its needs. He sees the difference now, he understands it all at last, and adores.

It is the testimony of history that "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" What Power is it that knoweth it altogether, that turns the heart inside out — this human heart, which has been too much for all the sages and poets of time; which no philosophy has been able to explain, and no literature has been able to delineate; and to apply a single imperfect key to which, in partial uncovering of its intricacies, is to earn for a man the highest distinction of genius? What Power, then, is this that tells a man all things that ever he did or thought or hoped or feared—not only his actions, but himself; not only all that he does, but all that he is and is to be, talking to his inmost soul familiarly of his future, as of his past? Who is this that reproves and comforts, casts down and builds up, kills and makes alive again, as one having authority? Tell us, in the name of weary, longing humanity, what authority is this? Is not this the Christ, the Desire of all nations revealed at last, answering "the universal 'come,'" the call which all weakness and darkness and sin and sorrow combine to pour into the pitying ear of the Father of the world? Is not this that great Prophet which was to come—Teacher, Revealer, Redeemer, Light of life, Conqueror of death, Guide to the eternal blessedness, the Christ whom heaven and earth have anointed, heaven with its truth, and earth with her tears, the world's Messiah and Prince of peace, for whom the heart of the world was breaking, and for whose coming the generations of time had fallen down on their faces and sent the cry of their despair up into heaven?

The cry has been long and bitter, but, thank God! it is answered. We are sure of that. Some of us know and can never forget how he talked with us by the way; how he laid our hearts bare; told us all we were, and all we were doing, in the error of our way. Ah, but we knew what we worshiped after that! We learned what that well is from which we drink and thirst no more. And now we want to live and die proclaiming his Messiahship over the aching and longing human heart—that realm where he alone is sovereign Lord, and where most truly is "the kingdom, and the power, and the glory."

What have the other religions of the world done for the common heart-life of the people? They have promulgated doctrines, founded institutions, and established customs; but how little has been done for the heart's purification or its rest, apart from Christ! How can the intellect dislodge him? He has planted an evangelical element in the depths of human sensibility that pleads for him with a voice that is heard forever over every cavil and clamor of the intellect. How can reason ever dethrone him? The heart will always exercise its own reason, and the intellect perceives this at last and comes into line; and so they stand, one undivided humanity, for one undivided Christ.

I am referring to plain facts, though not known as they should be. What was it that first broke that dismal, deathly spell which the rationalism of Germany had extended over her land, and was rapidly extending throughout the Christian world? In the decline and despondency of evangelical religion; in the gloomy triumph of a Christless rationalism; when Christian theology, philosophy, apologetics, and exegesis had done all they could do, and done all in vain; amid the general ferment of the elements—a man arose and uttered upon the air the single talismanic word "feeling." "Feeling?" said Germany, with her brow knit in thought; "yes, that is so. Man has a heart, as well as a head, by which to apprehend truth and express truth, and henceforth its deliverances must be taken into account and duly respected in the general argument." That word broke the spell. The stroke of that single broadsword tore through error, beat down her champions, and turned the tide of battle.

This reconciliation of the reason with the sentiments will always be marked as the dawn of a new era in the modern history of Christianity. I fear the Church has not learned even the text of this short chapter in her own history, much less the important lessons it teaches. There is no irrepressible conflict between the reason and the sentiments, the intellect and the heart, and we must beware of that increasing tendency of the modern pulpit, and of the Church generally, to regard the intellect as the lawful potentate over the working Christian forces, and the heart as an imbecile pretender hardly to be tolerated. We must not forget that one of the most important moral battles of modern times has been fought victoriously for the Church on this issue—the right of the heart to be recognized in summing up the spiritual forces of human nature. We must not forget that, when "the world by wisdom knew not God," Christ interpreted the heart of God to the heart of this world; and in our own times, when intellectual self-sufficiency threatened to ostracize Christ from the world, the heart insisted, went out after him, and bore him triumphantly back to his own,

The Bible comes to the deepest hunger of the world with the bread of life from heaven; and a famishing soul knows bread from stone. That woman, now filling a New England grave, who was found drifting all alone on the tossing Atlantic on a spar of the wrecked *Ocean Monarch*, yet in trustful communion with her Saviour, and singing in plaintive tones, amid the deathlike solitude of the seas,

> "Jesus, Lover of my soul,
> Let me to thy bosom fly,
> While the nearer waters roll,
> While the tempest still is high!"

represents that one undying hope that keeps each of us clinging to the wreck and singing over life's stormy ocean. O these deep experiences, these great emergencies of the heart, when helpless nature, swung out over the awful mysteries of life and death, feels for the everlasting foundations! For these the Gospel was given with its sweet, strong sympathy with the deepest life of humanity, with its resources to meet life's urgent needs. Christianity has a mission and an authentication that will carry it to the ends of the world.

So, proclaim this Messiah over our hearts, my brethren; this Jesus who leans over the world's old well and talks with us like a brother right from the presence of our Father, till we drink in the words of life from his lips, and the fever and the thirst are slaked by his words within us, springing up into everlasting life. O, tell all men of this Messiah; and, as long as human hearts beat amid the darkness and the sorrow of this world, they will repel all the assaults of infidelity, and human nature will tunnel the mountains of unbelief with its very heart-throbs after Christ.

And our hearts are full of the invitation of the woman of Samaria, "Come and see him." Is he one to awaken your suspicions, or to claim your confidence? Does this wonderful and holy character appear like one of the happy accidents of history, or is he the gift of heaven to your heart and mine? Come and see him. Tell us, "is not this the Christ?" And, if this is his character, will you not look upon him, will you not listen to him and receive him? If so, you shall soon say to us, as many said to her, "Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world."

X

The Ethical and the Æsthetic in Christianity

"Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."—Phil. iv, 8.

X

The Ethical and the Aesthetic in Christianity

I THINK the passage I have read may be regarded as one of the most remarkable sentences on record. Aside from the Scriptures we should probably search in vain for its parallel in any composition, ancient or modern. It urges the cultivation of all virtue and goodness to the highest degree the mind can conceive, and seems to contain in itself almost a complete system of ethics. To my mind it is especially interesting as illustrating the union of the moral and the beautiful, the ethical and the æsthetic in Christianity. It enjoins universal excellence, which is the highest ideal of Christian attainment.

We could hardly dispense with that word "excellence" in considering this subject. Coming from a root which signifies *to urge*, *impel;* hence, *to rise gently*, *to press above*, *to transcend*, no word better expresses the one thought in the apostle's mind. He seems to be so permeated with divine ideas and sensibilities, all seeking and struggling for utterance, that, after breaking forth in the highest fervors of a joyous salvation, soaring, glorying, triumphing in Christ, in the incomparable "excellency of the knowledge of Christ;" after enjoining humility, self-denial, moderation, and showing himself as practical as he had been impassioned; after enjoining the prayerful surrender of all the affairs of life to God, in the assurance that so shall the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep the heart, till we wonder what word can be added that would not be weakness, or what step could be taken that would not be a descent, he canopies the whole with this remarkable injunction, "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."

How easy to trace here the law of that principle of excellence which the apostle inculcates! How strikingly he delineates the method by which it operates—the only method by which the highest excellence may be reached. And surely there is no other word than "excellence" that will so nearly define the motive that has ever animated Christianity, that has given humanity the upward impetus accelerated through the ages, that has inspired and guided all the various efforts at reform which society has made its ever-advancing march. These have found in Christianity their originating or effectual impulse; Christianity has found in them her natural and appropriate outgrowth; and there can be no more quarrel between them than between the seed and the harvest.

The social and political, as well as the moral, progress peculiar to Christianity has been cumulative. Historically, she has exerted her influence in a series of advances of which each successive transition has been so gradual as to be almost imperceptible. And men have paused to challenge the result and say, "Where is the evidence that society is rising and improving through the influences of Christianity? We cannot see that we have made any progress or stand any higher." So a man might pause in the ascent of Mount Washington and, looking close around him, might say, "After all, I see no great elevation; it seems to be a little lower there and a little higher there; but where is the famous Mount Washington, with sweeping base and summit in the sky?" Sir, it is Mount Washington that sustains you while you ask. Look farther. Look at yon depths, look at yon heights. You have left that level, you are making for that summit. You are on Mount Washington! So it is Christianity that bears up the unsatisfied and nobly-aspiring progress that turns to challenge it. How is it that you object to it? Because it has lifted you up to the point of objecting. Why do you fail to appreciate it? Because its influence is all around you and beneath you and above you, and you are in the midst of it. You are on this mountain of the Lord, and you do not realize how lofty and sublime it is. But stand down there on the lowlands and see how its gigantic form towers majestically into the vast blue heavens; or toil on to the distant summit, and gaze at the world outspread below, and realize in one glad, exhilarating moment how far you have ascended from the low plain, from which you started to climb into a purer and clearer atmosphere.

The Christian religion cannot be separated from the lofty triumph of Christian civilization. The capstone of a temple will often glisten in the sunlight while the foundation is dim with shadows or hidden in the earth; yet there is not a beam that plays upon the summit but places there a golden crown to honor the obscure and forgotten foundation stones. Christianity and true progress never can misunderstand one another. They are one at heart; for excellence is the aim of the one as of the other.

And this word "excellence" fitly expresses the ideal of the Christian soul, which forever feels the divine impetus, tries to reach out, to rise higher, to lift itself up, to transcend its present, to realize its fullest capacity for improvement. Excellence is the fountain, the life of progress, and the Christian soul goes on, rising, towering, expanding, restless to surpass itself, hastening on, aspiring after its source, born of God and Godward bound. Religion is the living action of God's presence in men, breathing forth its divine spirit through all the turmoil and darkness of the world. And when it would seem that every pure principle, affection, and motive that language can express has been invoked, if this be not enough, if there be anything more, anything omitted in the enumeration, one rule of excellence covers all, one universal goodness at which the Gospel aims. " Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."

The text, in the inculcation of this excellence, of course excludes all opposites or direct sin. Those over whom sin reigns are utterly powerless to embody the character here described. Certainly, before this spiritual elevation can be attained or fairly begun, whatever is directly contrary to rectitude must be abandoned.

The text further prohibits all approximation to evil and appearance of it. Consequently, it proscribes all sophistical casuistry or reservation concerning duty; all questioning how little of goodness may suffice or what vicinity to evil may be tolerated; all rudeness, unseemliness, of language or manners; whatever is inconsistent with the truest Christian symmetry; those thousand nameless faults and foibles and peccadillos we hardly know how otherwise to define and certainly should not wish to describe.

It enjoins that high and persistent culture of the soul through which it passes beyond what is merely negative or relative and reaches up to a pure and positive excellence—and does this of its own volition, without the formal intervention and application of any external moral law; for the Christian spirit, though partly the product of obedience to Christian rules, yet becomes thereby in itself, the body of law being caught up into a living soul, the very highest human rule, the most spiritual, the most Godlike, of all law—the law of the spirit, as much beyond the letter as the letter was superior to the gross stone upon which it was chiseled.

Yet I believe all this compatible, and the whole Gospel compatible, with a happy, hearty, human life—not etherealized out of the world, not denaturalized into moral awkwardness and artificial propriety, but a genuine, downright, human life. Christianity lifts one up, not coercively, but by the continuous ascension of the spirit within him, so that he rises cheerfully and naturally, as a bird rises, and for the same reason—it is the law and method of his nature, the ascending impulse has been imparted to him.

In a word, the text sets before us as a goal the completeness of the Christian character, which is the same as to say the completeness of manly character, for the terms are interchangeable, and the ultimate Christianity is the complete development of humanity, the perfection of each separate personal character, the habitual contemplation of all things pure, worthy, and lovely, that habitual attitude of the soul which resists every temptation, no matter how alluring or how plausible, that conflicts with its highest possibilities. To this end it touches the secret springs of character in our thoughts. It proposes a pure, bright, hallowed thought-life, God's "eternal thought" leading our thoughts up into familiar communion with his own.

I know some people who have a passion for thinking on the dark, disagreeable side of everything, and of human character in particular. Their minds are instruments that apparently have but two strings; one is depravity, and the other is death. First they touch this string, and then that; but when they thrum both together and try to produce a chord the effect is altogether depressing. If the direction of our thought were left to them, their counsel would be something like this: "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are false, whatsoever things are dishonest, whatsoever things are ugly, whatsoever things are abominable; if there be anything paltry or anything rascally, think on these things." You observe how finely the text reverses this arrangement and seeks to irradiate the common chambers of the mind with the consecrating light of the highest truth and beauty.

All this, you perhaps say, is only idealistic, theoretical, inefficient. But on the contrary a familiarity with the excellent accomplishes some very practical results. It tends to embody itself, to express itself, in speech, in action; if in one form, then in all forms, for it is itself a unity. It is reflected from every relation, it is exhibited at every opportunity in life, until the individual's whole existence is seen to be an aspiration after universal virtue. That all Christians fully develop this maturity and symmetry of Christian stature is not claimed, is not true. But this development is preeminently the Christian's ideal; and the purification of our thought-life is the process by which this development must be attained.

And can anyone dare to imagine, so long as this text stands in the oracles of Christianity, that a saving faith can be divorced from purity and holiness, that a man untrue, unjust, dishonest, indifferent to the temporal welfare of his fellow-creatures can atone for all his immoralities in this world by a theoretical or outward piety? It is not, "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are faith, prayer, praise, worship; if they be intensely devotional, and if they be unquestionably evangelical, think on these things." There is a man in the road there distressed and dying. He has fallen into bad hands. Now, I may come along, the best and most zealous of Pharisees, meditating profoundly on the law of God on my way to offer sacrifice at the altar. But if I leave it to that half-heathen Samaritan to get down from off his beast and pick that man up and carry him into the inn and have him cared for and pay the expense himself I may depend on it that the Lord Jesus Christ will indorse the Samaritan's orthodoxy before he will indorse mine; and if I should some time happen to hear the Master preaching by the roadside or expounding in the temple, and he should bring in that incident as an illustration in some parable of his, I may be sure he would do so in a way to make my Pharisee blood tingle in my Pharisee veins and to show me how small, pitiable a thing a mere temple-going, legality-loving, mint-and-anise-tithing Pharisee will be in the kingdom of God.

The Christian does not need to bring everything successively and separately to the altar before he can be certain whether it can have a place in his heart. He has consecrated himself there, and whatever is in sympathy with that consecration, in sympathy with the glory of God or the good of man, goes straight to his heart of its own accord. Is a thing true? I am for it. Is it just? I am for it. Is it beautiful and lovely? I am for it. Has it any virtue or any praise, is there good in it or coming of it, do good men believe in it and speak well of it? I am a Christian; and you may count me for it without asking.

This is Christian service, and such service is perfect freedom. Says Martin Luther: "I am not of the opinion of those who wish to overthrow all the arts in the name of the Gospel; I only wish that they should be used in the service of the One who created them for us."

Whatsoever things are thus, no matter where you find them, no matter who projected them, what authorship they claim, or what name they carry, if they bear the impress of the true, the good, the lovely, there is divinity about them somewhere. At the same time you are not to embrace the wrong things that may be associated with them, the error or falsehood or mischief that may be intermingled with them. You are not to blind yourself to all distinctions and rush into fellowship with the evil to show your fellowship with the good. Whatsoever things *are*, saith the Gospel; the things that are *not* may require kindness and charity, but not fellowship and fraternity.

Therefore, if the man you call a heretic has any intermixture of truth in his creed, if you find there any truth, acknowledge that truth, adopt it, because it is the truth, and whatever is of the truth is honest and of good report. If a personal enemy, with all the faults and evils he may possess, yet shows a spark of virtue left shining in his soul, be glad for its shining and confess that it does shine; for virtue is of God everywhere. If the world is astir with any new idea that is good and wise, or if, without having stirred the world as yet, there is gathering any movement for reform of vice, for amelioration of misery, welcome it, cooperate with it; "think on these things," give them a warm place in your heart, and join heart and hand with them for the battle. Put away the evil, inaugurate the good. Put away the false, inaugurate the true. Everywhere crown the true and bless the beautiful forever.

How far does a man see into "the mystery of godliness" who does not see that, after all, goodness is the grand law of godliness in earth and heaven? "Ye that love the Lord, hate evil;" that is the distinctive sign that you do love him and belong to him; not that you hate this or that evil or love this or that virtue, but that you have that deep-down, genuine, earnest soul of goodness in you which hates the whole sum of the evil and loves the whole sum of the good, uniformly, every way, and all the way round. Let us pray always as we pray in the communion service—that prayer which is the sublimest, I have thought, of any uninspired prayer, if it be uninspired, that a mortal ever offered in the ear of God—"Confirm and strengthen us in all goodness." O, how much there is of God, how much there is of Christ, how the whole spirit of the Gospel stands glorified in this simple cry of the soul to be confirmed in goodness! "All goodness?" I do not ask a part; I do not pray for faith or hope or charity alone; but, O God, whatever is of thee, whatever is good, whatever is true and just and pure and lovely, in mercy make haste to perfect these things in me and confirm and strengthen me in *all* goodness. There is something in the good Gospel of the good God that tends to kindle involuntarily the ardor of the soul toward everything that is good. And the truest type of a Christian is not a man who has this good quality or that good characteristic, but a man who has an unconquerable loyalty to everything that is good, who has a genuine, hearty affection for it and spontaneous affinity with it, and who is good in this respect and that respect all the way through. If anything is evil, he hates it; if anything is good, he loves it. Because Christ is King and has begotten him into his kingdom, he clings to Christ with all his heart and longs to be "complete in him." This is his creed; he stands or falls with Christ.

How wonderfully the ethical and the æsthetic shade into each other in the religion of Christianity! We may not say that beauty is religion, but we may say that religion is duty and beauty. The pure and the lovely are scarcely separable elements. How practical and utilitarian and governmental, a restrictive force here, an impelling force there, religion needs to be in this matter-of-fact world, with all our variety of interests and obligations. Yet no angel sent into this world bathed with the rose-light of an immortal morn, with a brow of glistening love and gladness and a voice sweeter than the music of the spheres, could kindle us to such inspiring dreams of unearthly excellence or exalt us to such enthusiasm for all that is pure and beautiful and good. This religion will die only when all the noble promptings and all the best possibilities of humanity die.

When experience ceases to find in man a dark and evil nature that needs to be contended with and overcome, and a better nature that needs to be replenished and quickened and rendered victorious and supreme, when Christianity fails to respond to the weaknesses and the longings of human consciousness, it will be time to invoke something truer, something that accords better with the scientific knowledge and the needs of man. When a system is found that proves a mightier force than Christianity in the achievement of moral and spiritual results, that proves more restrictive to the evil, more liberating and crowning to the good, it will be time to invoke it for the uplifting of humanity. When the march of progress leads to the discovery of some deeper principle of excellence in the heart and mind, something whereby the will becomes more heroic, while the sensibilities become more refined, whereby genius takes a grander flight and poetry sings a sweeter song and the artist-soul frames a fairer vision, it will then be soon enough to sacrifice Christianity in the name of æsthetic taste. But while Christianity continues to meet the conditions of philosophic truth, of moral utility, and of spiritual beauty we shall not lightly fling it aside. We must suspect that this upland so conducive to the best culture of the soul, this garden of the graces, this home of all the higher humanities is likewise the altar of God.

So let everyone take the divinest dream of his soul and work out in character and action what God has wrought into the highest capacities of his being. And in this ever-aspiring activity will his soul find rest. For a soul ever true to the pursuit of excellence will move in an element of light and loveliness. It will be fed from immeasurable fountains of joy and beauty; and such souls will remind us of that beautiful track in the firmament called the Galaxy or Milky Way. Who has not seen that Milky Way in the still night and rejoiced? Who has not wondered and longed to penetrate its sacred mysteries? But astronomy is assured that its appearance is the result of innumerable stars, countless centers, clusters, systems of light, separately indiscernible, but whose rays go out and meet and mingle and blend, incessantly reflected and refracted to and fro in every direction, until the infinite space is traversed with one glowing belt, girdling the heavens for evermore.

We have sometimes known a Christian, whose graces, joined with graces—every one of them a heavenly radiation—were mutually shining upon and illuminating each other, and the light of each was radiant with the light of all, until the whole soul was aflame with the glory of the Lord. And I have longed that the whole Christian Church were a Church of such souls, that along the ascending way might stretch the luminous procession, where light is multiplied in light, and all are giving and all are receiving, and the radiance of redemption, diffused and blent in one intermingling, all-enveloping glow, might become a bridge of living light spanning the dark void from earth to heaven, until multitudes should look up, in the night of time, blessing the light of the true, the pure, and the lovely, and thinking on "these things."

XI

A Religion for All Time

"And they gathered it every morning."—Exod. xvi, 21.

XI

A Religion for All Time

WHAT a strange, beautiful spectacle must it have been to the children of Israel, emerging from their tents in the early morning as the night mists were rolling away, when they saw the ground overspread with the miraculous manna, white and pure and fresh as the winter's frost. It must have been easy, methinks, for them to offer their morning hymn of praise to the Father of all good gifts.

Let us sing praises that the spiritual manna falls oftener. The Christian Israel, marching through the world, finds it all the time falling, forever fresh and new. "Having, therefore, brethren," saith the Scriptures, "boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh." Millions have experienced and exclaimed, "What a new and living way this is." Yet, in the councils of God, the Lamb is "slain from the foundation of the world;" and this way is older far than the Jewish sacrifices.

The truth is, Christianity is both an old and a new way, ancient in its origin and authority, yet new in its adaptation to every fresh case of human sin and human sorrow and human aspiration; and the world has need of both its ancient foundations and its freshness as of youth.

There are persons who complain, and would have us believe, that our evangelical Christianity is comparatively new, is an innovation, a mere conventionalism—crystallized, indeed, around certain half historical, half mythical centers, appropriating to itself the name of Christ and some of the terms and phrases of the simple religion which he testified among men, but otherwise and substantially a strange plant interpolated, a morbid growth and a corruption of that simple religion. But, with the aid of the gospels and epistles of the New Testament—the most original and most direct sources of information that give access to the words and acts of Jesus—and further aided by the institutions and the literature of the early Christian age, it is easy for us to show that the evangelical Christianity of to-day is simply a continuation of the old and original Christianity that Jesus taught.

At the same time, there are many who scoff because, as they insist, it is old, worn-out, out of date, and out of place. But we are no less ready to claim for it immortal youth and perennial freshness that never can be exhausted and never can be superseded. It has much that is divinely old, and much that is divinely new; and it is only when the old and the new are combined that religion is seen in the whole range of its truth and in the mighty grandeur of its power.

Historically, Christianity is ever old; spiritually, it is ever new. It originated in an eternity past; and yet, like the manna, it is gathered every morning. In this twofold character it rounds itself out to the complete circle of human necessity and meets every requisition that can reasonably be made on a religion. Historically, ever old; spiritually, ever new—this, I think, gives us the true conception of Christianity.

The simple thought evolved from the text is, that we are to be manna gatherers—that we are to gather, often and in its freshness, the grace that nurtures the soul by divine communion. Food supposes life; life, food. And true religion is a life, a continuous, advancing life; not an occasional upheaving of some great principle stirring the soul; not a faith rising once in a while sublime over the standards of sight and sense; not self-denial going forth once a year all equipped for the battle and radiant with impulsive zeal for God. It is the spiritual heart forever beating. It is the spiritual vision forever uplifted. And the song that cheers its toilsome march is ever, "Nearer, my God, to thee."

What but this growth in grace will prevent a wearisome and discouraging monotony in the Christian journey? A man taking his accustomed walk every day over the same unvarying path is soon satiated with the finest prospect. But some morning he happens to pass beyond his old habitual limit—with what result? The hills have taken new form; the woods have caught a new coloring; he had never noticed that mountain slope in the distance; what a beautiful bend that is in the sky, as it goes circling among the headlands and silver-edging the golden beach beyond! A splendid view this is from the top of this hill! I never saw it in this fashion before—so near to where I have been living all my days, too.

Just as surprising is the effect on the whole spiritual landscape of an advance movement in religion. How one real victory over temptation explains a thousand promises we have read and reread and never understood or appreciated before! What a flood of new light comes pouring in with one hour of deep and earnest communion with the Master! Thus the interest of the advancing Christian traveler never flags. There is a fresh charm in every portion of his way. He passes from strength to strength, from glory to glory.

I remember now the opening sentence of a speech delivered at a political mass convention in New England, during my childhood, by an eminent statesman, who said, "Fellow-citizens, from the various distracting questions now at issue between the parties and deeply agitating the mind of the country, I propose to call your attention away to a plain question of—bread." Need we ask if he had their attention in an instant? Not a husband, not a father, not a provider for a household in that great assembly, but felt instantly the resistless eloquence of that word " bread." I might say that not only the orator, but the statesman, spoke there, for it is a question if the whole science of political economy does not resolve itself into one great science of bread. State questions and social conditions center in this and proceed from it. And in life's moral empire I doubt whether we ever get beyond the plain question of bread.

Character and history, all that we are and all that we do, are only so many different evolutions of our need of material, mental, and spiritual food. We never get beyond the measure of our actual spiritual supply, we never sink below it. We grow stronger or weaker, we go upward or downward, our graces and our works stand or fall in close ratio with our communion with God. Every morning the commandments of God look in upon us anew, like divine judges who are to sit on our case at eventide. The duties of life break in upon us anew, like armed bands, to lead us out to the battle.

The prince of the power of the air cometh forth as a false angel of light to allure, or as a roaring lion to devour. And you look down in the sadness of your soul and say, "How can I escape the evil, and how can I cleave to the good; how can I be true and pure and holy; how can I overcome to-day the world, the flesh, and the devil?" Then the promises whisper together, "Come, angel sisters, let us also fly and overtake him at the door, lest his soul should faint at the threshold of its way. Haste, angel sisters, we will bear him up in our hands, we will carry to him strength and comfort on our wings, we will bring him nearer his God to-day." You open the Bible—they have come! There are given you "exceeding great and precious promises, that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world." You look forth, and the ground is already white with the manna; you have only to gather it every morning.

God seems to have arranged the development of religion with a view, a special view, to the preservation of its everlasting newness. Have you ever noticed that even its purely intellectual side bears this peculiarity? The world is debating the religious question with as fresh an interest now as in any period past, though on different grounds. It is a curious fact that the intellectual interest in Christianity has not abated one iota in its whole course of more than eighteen centuries. "Is Christianity true?"—tell me if this is considered an indifferent issue to-day. "What is Christianity?"—tell me if our times account this an idle question. During the past nearly two thousand years there has not been an age so dark, an age when the human mind has been so ignorant, that Christianity has not shed into that age some light and strength to nourish the intellectual and moral life of society. At one time men are occupied chiefly in discussing the nature and first principles of religion; at another, with the discussion of the facts of its history or its special theological truths. One century is busy with doctrines, another with institutions. Now we have an interval of profound abstractions, and now of practical elaborations. Fundamentals are the specialty of one period, details of another. Again, a critical age sets in and insists on reviewing, redefining, and readjusting the whole subject.

The present is such an age; and it is not for us as Christians to find fault with the critical spirit. It is science that kindles it, and it is Christianity that kindles science. And the result of the critical spirit is a spur to human thought; a new movement of the human mind—even of mind that never moved before; an end of all inertia; a rebellion against all routine; a breaking away and coming up out of the deadlock of forms and fictions and stagnant conventionalities; a searching and sifting and digging down to the roots of things; a taking nothing for granted or matter of course any more; a summoning of all things before the open court of the world, making them to stand and plead on their merits. Behold, how a fiery debate is kindling around the globe and sharpening the wits of the world! Christianity is the subject of much of this, and the origin of most of it. A dead religion? Not very dead; on the contrary, it is a religion that can put new life into the race.

The very evidences of Christianity have been, to some extent, transformed and rearranged. New standpoints of examination have been reached, grander eminences attained. The argument grows broader. Biology, psychology, chemistry, languages, geographical exploration, exhumed manuscripts and marbles from monastic cloisters, from oriental monuments, from Palestine, from Chaldea, from Egyptian temples and Assyrian palaces—what a variety of sciences and pursuits and archæological treasures have contributed to this argumentative expansion! Thus the hungry mind, as well as the hungry heart, of man still finds in the Christian religion something ever fresh and new. There is yet no prospect that either the spiritual or the intellectual freshness of the Gospel will ever be exhausted while there are hearts to feel or brains to think in this world.

The importunate social problems that are clamoring for solution are largely ethical; and when we think of the ethical or moral element we involuntarily think of Christ, the only perfect expounder of ethics whom history has known. The wisest minds perceive that it is to Christianity that society must look for the solving of its profoundest problems; that only Christianity can simplify and unify the movement of an increasingly complex civilization and bring in a higher social with a higher moral order.

Of course, it is not necessary to assume that every ebullition of organized selfishness or popular passion has its real underlying cause in a noble unrest making for the lifting upward of human society. Nor can anyone yet tell how far the Christian ideal of society is capable of being realized by revolutionary, rather than evolutionary, processes. Yet the fact remains that the kingdom of God is founded upon ideas and principles that make for the higher social as well as spiritual development of the race. And these principles have not only a progressive but a necessary activity, and whatever will not fall in with their current voluntarily is swept into it involuntarily; for sometimes the operations of God in the world are like the movement of the air and of the sea, that nothing can withstand. Men are authorized to expect, not a new kingdom of God, but a new manifestation of it; and in ascertaining and defining and applying these principles they will need all their wisdom as well as all their skill. The decisive centuries of the world's history are not all past.

Great is their mistake who imagine that the social changes and peculiarities of this age are altogether adverse to the Christian life. On the contrary, they are favorable to it. Less than fifty years ago religion hardly entered directly into a man's social life—hardly enough to feed the hunger of his sympathies and satisfy his demand for religious activity and association. Sundays it preached to him, once or twice a week it prayed and sang with him; but at the church door it parted with him—as a social being. Now it is prepared to hold him in continuous and hallowed enthusiasm. There were then but few religious books or papers, and most of them are now interesting chiefly because of their strange dearth of interest. We are surprised that such curiosities of dullness could have once been so current; and yet they were. Now mark the profusion of religious literature in all its ample and attractive variety and within the reach of all. Then the representative religious music, though stately and solemn, lacked much of that sweet soulfulness, that sentiment of pathos and ringing victory, that reaches and melts and moves all classes, the heart of childhood and of age, giving to our concerts of praise such a wondrous charm and power.

Then if a man enjoyed any opportunities of doing or receiving good beyond the familiar church routine it was because he had made them for himself. Now such opportunities seek him. He is fairly immersed in Christian work, mind, body, and soul. The organized departments of religious work are continually appealing to him, throwing themselves upon his hands and heart for sympathy and care and aid. There is the League, and the lyceum, and the social circle, and the temperance society, and the benevolent society; this week a committee, and next week a convention. And, besides all these, the Young Men's Christian Association, the Sunday school work in its various phases, and the great cause of missions are worlds in themselves. There is something all the time to interest him, to animate him in the work of righteousness and manly usefulness, to neutralize temptation and call forth his noblest powers. Especially, a young Christian in these times is the most enviable of mortals. The earth does not hold a busier, happier, freer, more exalted soul than that person who broadly enters into the Christian spirit and work of to-day; whose prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread," God answers with the living bread that cometh down from heaven. Lord, evermore give us this bread!

It is such a blessed thing to be a manna gatherer. There are enough who gather all that is sinful and sorrowful that the world offers, enough who faint and falter in the great struggle of life. They do not know how the manna falls in the night, and light springs out of darkness, and good is wrought out of evil, and the joy of immortality is born of the despair of death. But if you will be of the Israel of God resolve to be a manna gatherer. God will lead you nowhere where he does not send it showering down around you. Over barren rocks that yield no earthly verdure, amid scorching deserts that wither every fruit that never-tiring nature tries to ripen, through the night shades of trial and temptation, everywhere—soft and silent as the dew of heaven, everywhere the unfailing manna falls. Gather it. Gather it every morning. Daily gather up God's quiet bounties of strength and joy and hope. Resolve to go out into the world and know for yourself the satisfying sweetness and blessedness of life. Though you break the hard earth of adversity, yet above you will spread an open heaven of love; and you will learn, by an experience that will bring you comfort and peace, that where sin abounds grace does much more abound, and though pestilence walketh in darkness, yet through the darkness do fly the angels of God. Nobly set yourself to take the truer, Christian view of life. Let the whole Church live on the daily manna, the living bread ever coming down from heaven.

And then shall we not be forced to blush when the skeptic demands a newer and better truth and religious revelations that are adapted to the present advanced development of the human mind. We shall no longer wince at the sarcasms he directs against what he is pleased to consider an old and worn-out Gospel. But we shall make glad answer, rather. God does not so much design that we shall find the interest and freshness of spiritual life in new truth as in new applications and experiences of the truth, new discoveries of its meaning and power, deepening with every want, heightened with every joy, expanding with our capacity to receive it, modified with every modification of circumstances affecting the individual, and society, and the world at large.

The germinating power of Christianity bears fruit in every age, on every soil, according to the peculiarities of that soil, according to the requirements of that age. It rearranges its work, adjusts its influences and energies to the new conditions of society on which it has to act, so that no emergency can take it by surprise, no social or moral progress of society can leave it behind. The world may grow and grow, but it can no more outgrow the Gospel than this planet can outgrow the heavens. Christianity elevates government, popular education, the social relations, the use of wealth and power; it opens missions; it endows schools, hospitals, orphanages; it establishes charities of every kind and everywhere—charities that girdle the globe; proclaims liberty, promotes peace, compels reform, and utilizes the world's forces; and it does all this by means of a mighty array of sympathetic influences and related institutions with which the popular mind scarcely credits it at all, and so develops a higher and broader humanity, rallying and reinforcing the powers of righteousness. Christianity is doing a work to-day which the primitive Christians probably never dreamed of its doing or attempting. The world changes; but with every new historic morning God's manna is on the ground.

The manna that fed the Jew will not feed the Christian; and, perhaps, the manna that feeds the Christian of to-day will be inadequate to the Christian of the future. For He is coming—Christ is coming. I see his brow, beaming with a light that never encircled ours. I hear his step, resounding along the highways of the "good time coming" and heralding a higher freedom for humanity. He is coming, with no new Gospel, but with new expositions and applications that would seem almost a new Gospel if it were preached to our conservatism to-day.

"None of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself." The Jew lived and wrought and died for our day unknowingly; and we are entered into his labors. We as unknowingly live and work and die for the coming times; and into our labors will enter still other laborers. And Christ enters into all—the food of the ages, by whom they all live and grow. And so the good old way is still the "new and living way," and the Gospel that was in the beginning is now and ever shall be; not stationary, not stagnant, but full of the freshness and freedom essential to the soul's proper activity and the world's perpetual renovation and progress and growth. O how the living waters flow, and the heavenly manna falls! The feast is spread in the wilderness, the pillars of cloud and fire lead on, and soon we shall strike our tents and march triumphantly into the promised land.

"Belov'd, belov'd! not fire and cloud alone
  From bondage and the wilderness restore,
And guide the wandering spirit to its own;
  But all His elements, they go before.
Upon their way the seasons bring,
And hearten with foreshadowing,
    The resurrection wonder.
What lands of death awake and sing,
    And germs of hope swell under!
And full and fine, and full and fine,
The day distills life's golden wine;
And night is Palace Beautiful, peace-chambered.
All things are ours; and life fills up of them
  Such measure as we hold.
    For ours beyond the gate,
  The deep things, the untold,
    We only wait."

XII

The Millennial Call

"O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of the Lord."—Isa. ii, 5.

XII

The Millennial Call

THE voice of divine invitation—how variously it falls upon our ears! Sometimes like the peal of a bugle, so high and loud and glad; sometimes like a sweet and plaintive song, breathing upon the heart's deepest chords with heavenly tenderness, the very pathos of the skies. It falls upon our ears and upon our hearts in the words of our text: "O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of the Lord."

To walk in the light is to walk in the truth of the Lord; to live in conformity with the precepts and privileges revealed in his word. Yet it is well worth our effort to ascertain more definitely what the prophet means by walking in the light, or truth. It may aid us in discovering his meaning to quote the full passage in which our text occurs: "And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of the Lord."

You will see at once that this is a description of the Messiah's earthly reign. Here we have the worship of God portrayed under the figure of a mountain. The Church will be baptized with the Spirit of God and will draw the nations into its communion; and the conditions of society will be brightened with the pervading power of the Gospel truth. "Thy word," said the psalmist, "is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path."

The word, that is, the truth, of God is light, and to whatever extent the truth is experienced that light shines. Let the truth enter an individual soul, and darkness has passed away; let the truth shine in with all its splendor, and the heart is filled with a millennial blessedness. Let the truth permeate any church, and it will experience a millennial power and glory. And if ever there is to be a reign of righteousness and peace and gladness throughout the world it will spring from the aggregated experience of each of the different individual hearts and homes and churches and communities and nations of the world.

There is possibly a difference of opinion in this congregation, indeed in every congregation, on the probability of a universal, redeeming reign of Christ in this world. But we all concede how unspeakably desirable would be such a glorious consummation; and its very desirableness inspires our hope and tends in large measure to its own realization.

Let us, then, suppose ourselves to be fully convinced that a period will come when the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together; when the knowledge of his glory shall cover the earth "as the waters cover the sea;" when no man shall teach his brother, "saying, Know thou the Lord: for all shall know me from the least to the greatest;" when the weapons of destructive war shall be applied to the peaceful pursuits of useful industry, childlike trust shall take the place of fear and terror in the earth, and the Messiah shall reign in the midst of his saints; when all the holiness and all the happiness and all the redemptive power predicted of the Messiah's earthly reign at last are realized, and "the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ."

Now, what is the truth that must be realized before so remarkable a period can be inaugurated?

We first assume that all acknowledgment of the truth must be a practical acknowledgment conceded by the whole being, and widely different from the mere conviction of the understanding or confession of the lips; that the heart must assent to whatever religious idea or opinion receives credit as truth with a sincere, adoring, unquestioning "amen."

Truth, especially religious truth, must be something more than a spiritless and empty shadow. It must be something more than mere matter for debate, something more than a mere creed or a name. It must command a reverence worthy of its divinity. It must be a positive and controlling reality, wielding an absolute supremacy over the entire man. It must vitalize every faculty of the soul and be applied in every action of the outer life.

And, further, before Christ shall appear the second time, and all the holy angels with him, before the Church can shine in its highest terrestrial splendor, and all nations shall flow unto it because the Lord's house is established in the top of the mountains and exalted above the hills and because of the beauty of holiness, before the ransomed of the Lord shall return with joy and gladness unto Zion, the Saviour's rich and sanctifying grace and the height and depth of the Gospel's capacity to bring men from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, must be the supreme inspiration of praise and thanksgiving.

The eighth chapter of Romans must become the positive and profound experience of the Christian Church. All sense of condemnation as oppressing those who profess to be the Lord's, all thought of duties unperformed and privileges unaccepted, of prayers unoffered and praise unrendered, of affections opposed to the love of God or attachment to any sort of business or pleasure inconsistent with a reverent sense of his presence and of our own responsibilities, must be lost in the full and complete blessedness of the knowledge that we are more than conquerors through him that loved us and gave himself for our redemption. We must diligently study the word of God. We must drink long and deeply of the fountain that was opened for sin and uncleanness—the fountain whence flow the rivers of salvation that are for the healing of the nations. We must fill our hearts with a heavenly love that is manifested in every word and deed, in every thought and motive of our being.

We hear the Gospel lifting its joyful sound, like a trumpet, and calling men to journey in a highway that is prepared for the redeemed to walk in, even the King's highway of holiness. From the north and from the south and from the east and from the west, lo, they come, the children of Zion come thronging, judgment is laid to the line, and righteousness to the plummet, and upon the bells of the horses is written, "Holiness to the Lord."

A determined walk in the truth means, also, the fulfillment of the visible duties which the truth discloses, such a growth toward maturity in righteousness as shall reveal itself in the numerous relations of life. Parents and children, brothers and sisters, kindred, neighbors, citizens, rulers and subjects, employers and employed—all must maintain their different relations in the Lord. The young, the middle-aged, and the old, people of every position and every sphere, must perform the duties and exhibit the highest graces possible to their several stations. Religion must permeate vitally the manifold arrangements of society and be, in fact, the mainspring of all its movements. Indeed, the business of life itself must be to serve and enjoy and glorify God, and carry forward his high designs for the good of all his creatures.

An ardent devotion to God's service must distinguish every soul, and men's value be estimated by their value to Christ and by the priceless cost of their redemption. Each soul must give abundant utterance to his sense of God's great goodness in redeeming him, and must talk of his righteousness and sing of the glorious majesty of his kingdom.

No winebibbing Christian, no self-impeached Christian, no railing or foul-mouthed member of the Church of God, no covetous eye, no overreaching hand shall defile the radiant ranks of the Church triumphant when it has at last become the pure and spotless bride of the crucified and risen Lord. Clean motives, a purified sensibility, an intense spirituality of mind, must repel every attempted invasion of the powers of darkness and sin. Every occasion must be seized to exalt the name of God, every opportunity improved to promote the holiness and happiness of his creatures. And when at last the supreme desire of humanity shall have become a universal and entire harmony with the purposes of God, then will the earth become in very deed the prelude and vestibule of heaven. It means all this to walk in the light and the truth of the Lord.

But this metaphor which represents the truth as light suggests also the effects of the light, the general and diffusive influences which radiate from it; and this greatly enlarges the significance of the metaphor. As all the rich varieties and combinations of color we witness are only so many modifications of light, as light not only brings safety but reveals the beauty so requisite to human happiness and æsthetic growth, so all the rich, sweet, heavenly hues that present the millennial world so fair and lustrous to our thought are but the varied reflections and blessings of that vital light which saves the soul from sin.

Let us, then, behold the house of Jacob walking in the light, when at length the Lord's house shall have been established on the mountain top and all nations are flowing unto it.

What blessed peace there is! Remorseful agitations, gloomy misgivings, distracting doubts and fears, that threw their dark and lingering shadows over our way—lo, they are fled, and the peace of God, that passeth all understanding, fills to overflowing our hearts and minds. No earthly idol comes between to eclipse the splendor of celestial light; neglected crosses mar no longer the pleasing vistas of our redeemed and ransomed lives; no black cloud-masses of temptation and sin shall dim the holy confidence with which we shall look up to God our Father and to heaven our home. The world has lost its evil dominion over us. Its misleading lights of sinful pleasure and ambition no longer allure us into danger; for we have found in the favor and friendship of God a portion that outshines the world's brightest fortunes, and a consolation that illumines our darkest adversities.

Not only do we now experience a sweet contentment, but we feel within us ardent, heart-lifting impulses, a lofty and noble enthusiasm for all that is pure and good and beautiful. There is no dullness in life, now, for the light of the Lord irradiates the landscape and illumines all the dark places in our path. Every faculty of our being is alert and developed to the highest pitch of pure and sanctified enjoyment. There is no bitterness of spirit, no envy, hatred, malice, nor any uncharitableness, for light has shone into the depths of the soul and gladdened it with universal love. We have new objects to work for, new affections and new powers to work with. The light of the Lord changes the dismal hues of the great world into brightness and beauty, and heaven is mirrored upon earth as the sky upon the sea.

So shall the house of Jacob walk in the light as God is in the light, and have fellowship one with another; and the blood of Christ shall cleanse them from all sin and impurity. Let us, then, welcome the hour of prayer; welcome the communings of the closet and the sanctuary; welcome smiling fortunes if they be given us, that we may consecrate them to Christ; welcome, if need be, the trials that shall discipline our faith and develop our Christian fortitude and courage. Let Christians everywhere and at all times be hopeful and of good heart,

"For they are tending upward too,
As fast as time can move;
Nor would they wish the hours more slow,
To keep them from their love."

No, they are pilgrims on the march to a more beautiful country, "a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." Every hour claims its toilsome effort and its urgent duties; but the way grows brighter as it nears the heavenly portals, and the journey ends at length in the ecstasies of immortal joy.

I have attempted to outline what the truth is that shall reign with Christ at his coming again and the methods by which that truth must be enthroned and the Prince of Peace made undisputed sovereign of the world and of men. Before this can be accomplished men must learn to reverence the truth and reverence Him who is "the way, the truth, and the life." They must go wherever the truth shall lead them, though it be into the dens of lions, or into dark Gethsemanes, or up the painful slopes where waits some lonely and relentless cross. They must be alive to the importance of enjoying the highest spiritual privileges within their grasp. They must fulfill, with all their heart and mind and soul and strength, the ordinary duties with which life confronts them. They must suffuse all their human relationships with such divine faithfulness and hope and love that by the very performance of life's humble duties their Christian character shall be strengthened and perfected. In no other way can the millennium which so many laden and longing hearts look forward to with patient hope and expectation be brought at length to a blessed and complete realization.

And now let me ask, whether belief or disbelief in the probability of the coming of the glorified Christ to reign over a purified and sanctified earth a thousand years at all affects the responsibility of an individual or a generation living under the Gospel dispensation to walk in the clear and holy light of God. If all men would but accept that dispensation, as all may accept it if they will, then would be realized the long-deferred hope of the saints, and a millennium would begin in all respects similar to that of Jewish prophecy and Christian faith. If all other men, my brother, should prefer darkness to light, that would not excuse you from your duty to walk in the completest day of the Sun of righteousness. It would still be your duty to devote your undivided heart to Christ's service, though all men else should live in the blackness of willful iniquity. If ever the millennium is to come it must be ushered in through the conversion and consecration of a multitude of such individual souls as you. May it not be that through your efforts some soul may be saved that shall turn many to righteousness and herald the dawning of the better day?

On his cross, at the moment of his bitterest agony, Christ bowed his head and cried with his expiring breath, "It is finished." Do you need to ask what it was that was finished? The work of revelation; the atoning work of redeeming a perishing world, at the price of the shameful death of the only-begotten Son of the eternal Father. Henceforth no man was to add to or take from the book of prophecy. All that was needed to save the world, except the work of repentance in each separate sinful heart, had been accomplished. An atoning Christ, a sufficient Bible, a divine and indwelling Holy Spirit, had been offered to the world, and all the forces of salvation had been projected into the moral universe.

It now lay with each separate unit in the vast aggregate of humanity to open his own poor, sin-burdened heart to a reign of peace and love and gladness, to a millennium in his own personal consciousness and the activities of his own personal life, and thus do all that was in his power to bring about the universal reign of Christ over a redeemed and renovated world. It is not our business to wait for the millennium, but to work for it, to appropriate its spirit in our very souls and embody it in our lives, claiming the utmost privileges of our redemption, fulfilling the utmost duties of our various stations, and seeing to it that within the circle of our own influence God's will is really done on earth as it is done in heaven.

The fountain that is to cleanse the nations, what is it but the old, old fountain opened eighteen hundred years ago? O, how it gushes and overflows this very moment! The light that shall shine down upon the holy Church and the happy world that are to be, what else is it but the heavenly radiance from this very Book whose precepts and promises your children know by heart? The wolf that shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard that shall lie down with the kid, what are they but emblems of that charity that should now fill our souls? And the law that shall go forth from Zion—the Zion of a purified and living Church—and take possession of all law and literature and philosophy, all ideas and institutions of society, and cause all nations to flow unto the Lord's house established in the top of the mountains—what is this but an expression for a spiritual fervor and fidelity that should characterize every sanctuary where God is worshiped, and where now it too often happens that barely half the pews are tenanted with listless souls. O, how God is calling, and how the house of Jacob is delaying!

For the use of our privileges we are responsible, and by these we shall be judged; not by our conformity to the articles of a Church creed, not by a mere intellectual assent to this doctrine or to that, but by the use we make of our opportunities for developing our own Christian characters by caring for the needy, the helpless, the sorrowing, and the sinful. To do this is pure and undefiled religion and the test of our loyalty to Christ; and to him we owe as true and self-sacrificing allegiance now as if, this very hour, his visible throne were set up in the midst of the earth, and patriarchs and prophets, apostles and martyrs and saints, summoned from their long-forgotten graves before our very eyes, stood about him and ministered to him as princes of his court.

You are thinking of that bright era as something far off; but no, the foundations of its glorious and golden temple are already laid. What matters it whose hands shall raise its capstone, or whose eyes shall behold the finished beauty of its mighty architecture, or whose voices shall cry, "Grace, grace unto it?" We can build on the foundation that is laid, even Christ. That foundation is as solid and sure at this moment as it will ever be. It takes millions of people to make up a millennium, but any man may make up his own part of it. Our duty is to be millennial men and women; to go up and down these streets, to walk the earth daily, feeling and knowing that we represent just so much of the world's grandest hope, just so much of God's glory in a redeemed humanity. Our duty is to do business on millennial principles, and on no other. Our duty now is to make our homes homes of millennial blessedness as really as if the music of Christ's passing chariot and the acclamations of adoring millions rolled daily in at our windows, and the smoke of our chimneys rose toward the peaceful heavens throbbing with the loving nearness of our God. Our duty is to make this church as truly an abode of reverent and absorbing worship as if the very Christ walked daily these aisles, and gave sanctity to these altars, and listened to every sermon, every prayer, every hymn, every exhortation that rises within these walls, and taught from this pulpit his gracious words of truth and power.

The millennium? Yes, it is the ideal of every longing soul that burns with love to God and man. It is the "good time coming"—a time of righteousness and happiness, when all shall know the Lord and love one another.

But where are our millennial men, our millennial ministers, our millennial churches, like cities set upon a hill, representing the grand possibilities of humanity in the Gospel and working to actualize the triumphs of redemption of which we love to talk and sing? Millennial! God forgive us! Where are even our revival men, our revival members of churches and class meetings and prayer meetings, full of all faith in God's truth and communicating faith to others by the fruits of their faithful Christian lives?

"O come ye!" So much depends upon leaving the old familiar haunts where darkness lingers, so much depends upon stepping out from the old unsatisfying experiences and the old conventional routine and following the standard that leads into light.

Nothing short of this can bring a man out of darkness or set his soul at liberty. "O come ye!" The world has called, and we have hearkened and have followed its baleful lights that lead only to gloom. Will not the past suffice? Let us now hearken to a diviner call and walk the rest of our pilgrimage in a sweeter and purer light.

Our text utters one of the sweetest "comes" in the whole Bible. It summons us to no impossibility, it perplexes us with no obscure or dubious standards of duty. What is impracticable and unattainable, what is dubious and obscure, is not light. The text points to a light which each heart instinctively recognizes as its native element, the source to which, when every hindrance is removed, it aspires as naturally as smoke rises into the higher atmosphere. It summons you into the light of God. Come into it, walk in it, let it envelop you and fill you through and through.

Anyone may come; everyone may come; whosoever will may come. Unless you come into the light, my brother, condemnation is inevitable. Not even the most rigid moralist, not even the most sincere and candid skeptic can refuse the light that shineth in darkness and stand erect at the bar of his own conscience. But if only the soul throws open its windows to the warm and benignant rays of the celestial sunlight, condemnation is impossible and the soul shall stand justified and without fear before the judgment seat of Christ. Is the soul dark; is life dark; is death dark; is everything dark? Come; nothing but light will end the darkness, and when you come the shadows shall flee away.

There is nothing simpler, nothing wiser and more reasonable, nothing sweeter than to come out of darkness into the light. It will bring strength and peace, purity and rest, usefulness and victory, and countless millenniums of glorified eternity. Come, then, leave every worldly pleasure, every false path that leadeth only unto death, and let us hasten to yield ourselves to the Messiah's rightful sovereignty, that he may reign over us forever and forever.

Sometimes, as you turn over the pages of precept and promise—precepts so true and promises so inspiriting—there comes a vision to you, and you close your eyes and dream a wonderful dream. You think how blessed would be humanity if it only accepted these precepts and these promises; how heart would be turned to heart; what happy families, what peaceful, prosperous nations would be the glad result; and you close with a sigh and say, "O, what a world this might be." God help us each to say, rather, "O, what a man, what a woman, I might be." Ye who perceive what pure religion would do for the world confess what it would do for yourselves. Ye who have faith in the future have faith in to-day. Ye who think ye behold afar off, on the mount foretold by prophecy, the beaming of the latter-day glory, who have lingered in spirit amid the light and love of a millennium to be, who have listened in thought to the soft chime of its bells and flow of its peaceful waters, who have looked upon the mellow beauty of its skies and trodden the soft turf of its sacred fields—know ye that this hour is the millennium reached out to your souls, and that the Messiah waits to inaugurate his holy and triumphant reign.

And thou who walkest life's paths in darkness and sadness, finding no comfort and catching no ray of hope or joy, thou mourner along life's lonely road, Jesus waits to give thee the light of life, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended. O come. Come now. Christ is waiting where the many mansions be. The Spirit is knocking at your heart. The millennial bells hang ready for human hands to ring in the new and better time. What wait you for? O house of Jacob, O all the earth, come ye; let us wait no longer, but let us walk from this moment in the light of the Lord.

Will you take the first step? O human soul, made to exist in an element of light, even in the light of God forever, unless that step be taken the alternative for you may be darkness leading unto darkness, overshadowing, deepening, yea, overwhelming —the "outer darkness" where God and Christ and heaven and the redeemed of earth are not. Take the first step, and other steps will follow, leading you to that perfect light where is no darkness at all. Take the step and your whole being shall be bathed in light, your whole life henceforth be a mission of light.

Take a step this very hour toward the light, and it may be that the one step will usher you into the light. O come ye, and let us walk in the light of the Lord, toward the ringing of the glad millennial bells.

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